DREAMER'S WORLDS—*Brilliant Novelette by* EDMOND HAMILTON

NOVEMBER

Weird Tales

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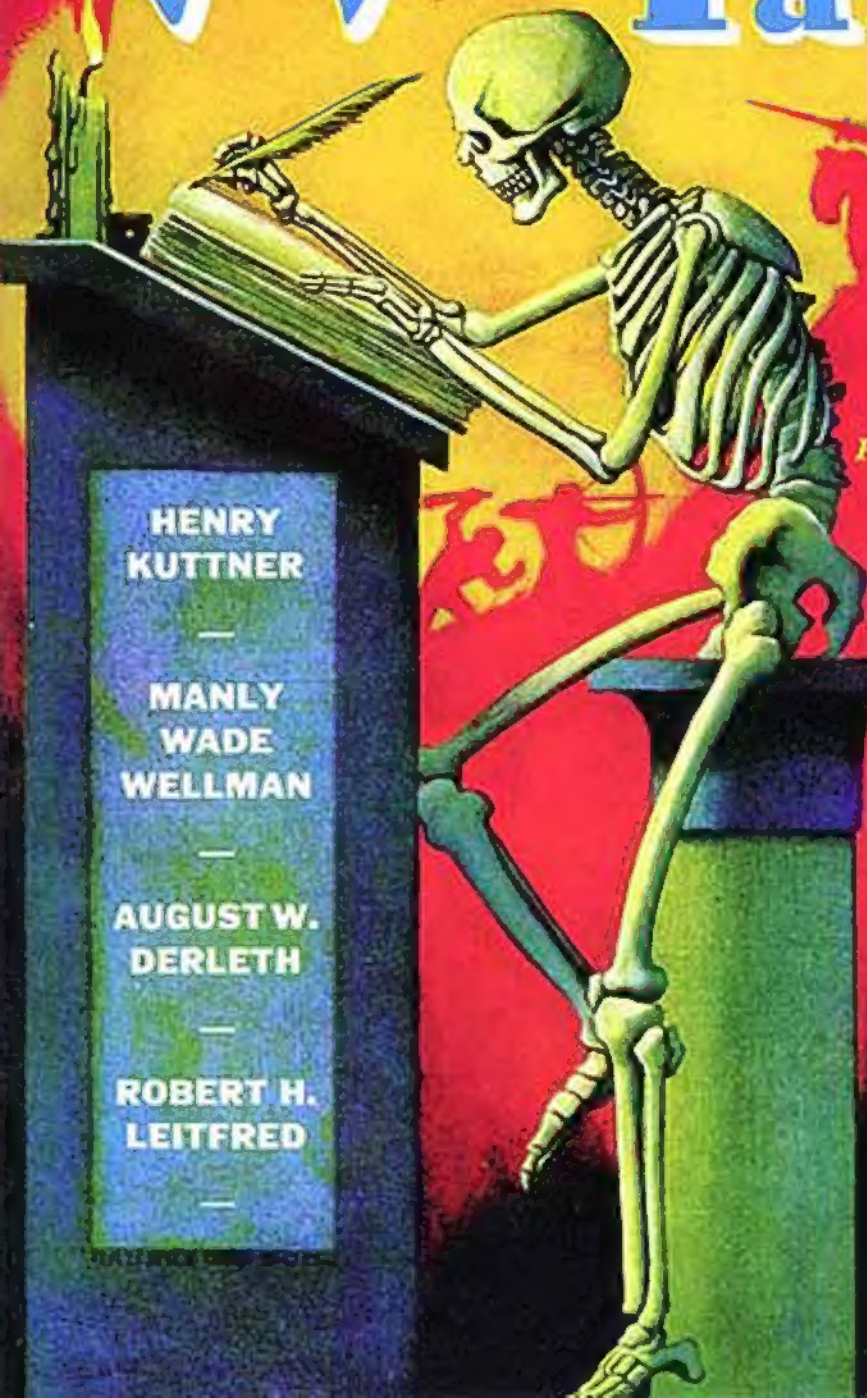

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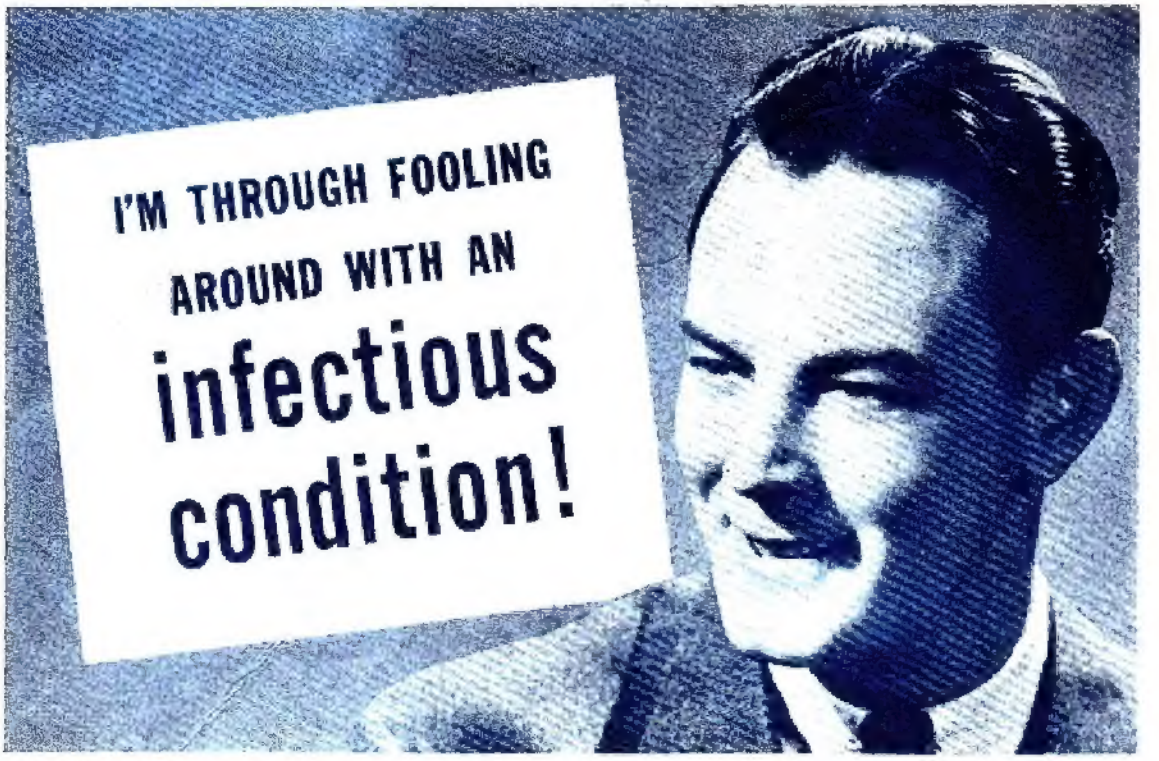

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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Vol. 36, No. 2

D. McILWRAITH, *Editor.* HENRY AVELINE PERKINS, *Associate Editor.*

THOUGHTS HAVE WINGS

You Can Influence Others With Your Thinking!

TRY IT SOME TIME. Concentrate intently upon another person seated in a room with you, without his noticing it. Observe him gradually become restless and finally turn and look in your direction. Simple—yet it is a positive *demonstration* that thought generates a mental energy which can be projected from your mind to the consciousness of another. Do you realize how much of your success and happiness in life depend upon your influencing others? Is it not important to you to have others understand your point of view—to be receptive to your proposals?

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How many times have you wished there were some way you could impress another favorably—*get across to him or her your ideas*? That thoughts can be transmitted, received, and understood by others is now scientifically demonstrable. The tales of miraculous accomplishments of mind by the ancients are now known to be fact—not fable. The method whereby these things can be intentionally, not accidentally, accomplished has been a secret long cherished by the Rosicrucians—one of the schools of ancient wisdom existing throughout the world. To thousands everywhere, for centuries, the Rosicrucians have privately taught this nearly-lost art of the practical use of mind power.

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6.25-17	2.45	1.15
29x6.25-18	2.45	1.15
32x6.25-19	2.45	1.15
30x6.26-20	2.50	1.15
31x6.25-21	2.50	1.15
6.50-17	2.75	1.15
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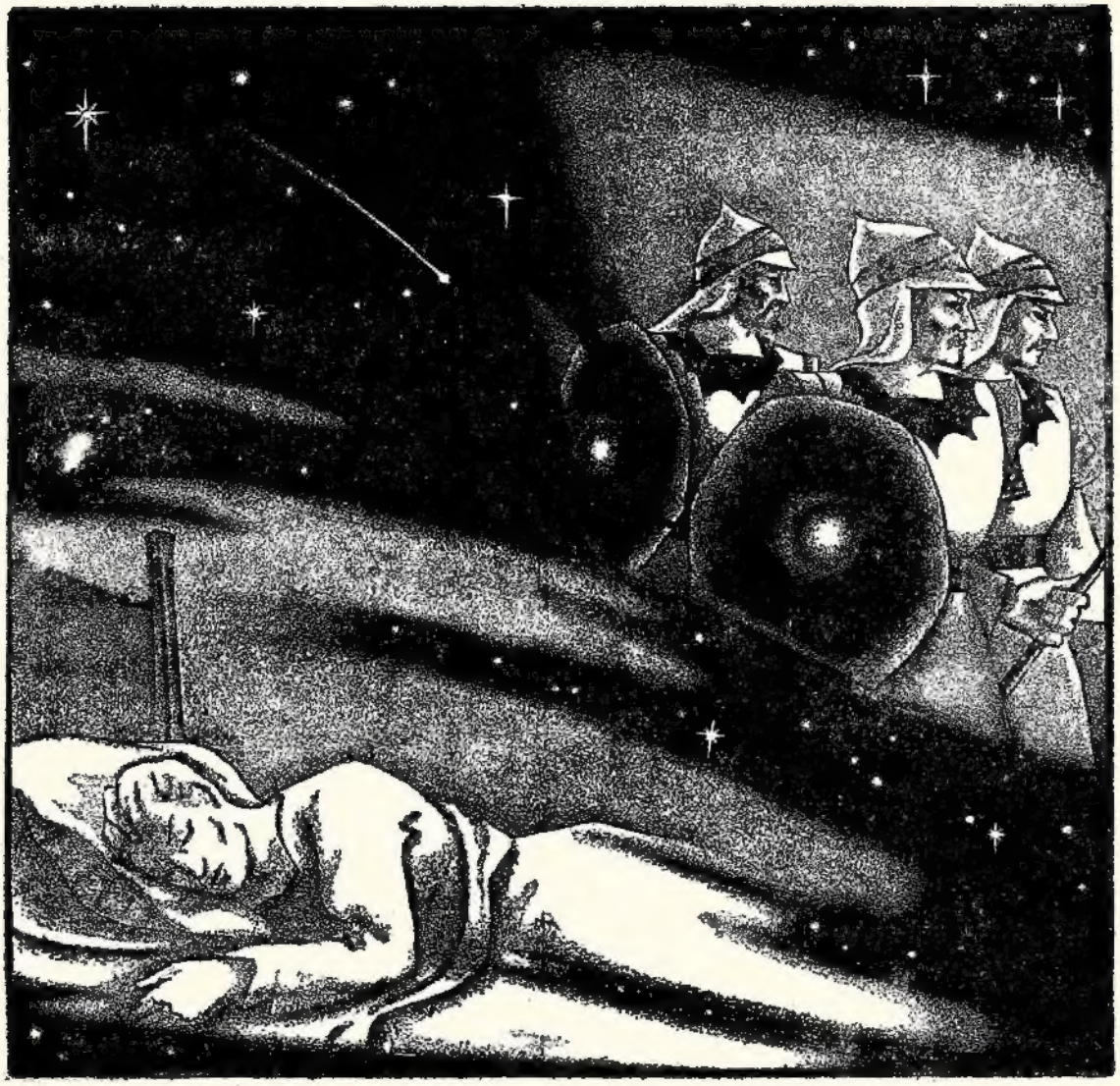


Dreamer's Worlds

Surely the world of Thar—its strange cities and enormous mountains, its turquoise seas, twin moons and crimson sun—is nothing but a dream? And yet . . .

REINING in his pony on the ridge, Khal Kan pointed down across the ocher sands of the drylands that stretched in the glare of the crimson, sinking sun.

"There we are, my lads!" he announced heartily. "See yonder black blobs on the desert? They're the tents of the drylanders."

His tall young figure was straining in the saddle, and there was a keen anticipation on his hard, merry young face.

Swift Fantasy Novelet of a Dreamer and His Dream

By EDMOND HAMILTON

But Brusul, the squat warrior in blue leather beside him, and little Zoor, the wizened third member of the trio, looked uneasily.

"We've no business meddling with the drylanders!" accused brawny Brusul loudly. "Your father the king said we were to scout only as far west as the Dragal Mountains. We've done that, and haven't found any sign of the cursed Bunts in them. Our business is to ride back to Jotan now and report."

"Why, what are you afraid of?" demanded Khal Kan scoffingly. "We're wearing nondescript leather and weapons —we can pass ourselves off to the drylanders as mercenaries from Kaubos."

"Why should we go bothering the damned desert-folk at all?" Brusul demanded violently. "They've got nothing we want."

Little Zoor broke into sniggering laughter. His wizened, frog-like face was creased by wrinkles of mirth.

"Our prince has heard of that dryland princess—old Bladomir's daughter that they call Golden Wings," he chuckled.

"I'll be damned!" exploded Brusul. "I might have known it was a woman! Well, if you think I'm going to let you endanger our lives and the success of our reconnaissance for a look at some desert wench, you—"

"My sentiments exactly, Brusul!" cried Khal Kan merrily, and spurred forward. His pony galloped crazily down the crimson ridge, and his voice came back to them singing.

"The Bunts came up to Jotan,
Long ago!
The Bunts fled back on the homeward track
When blood did flow!"

"Oh, damn all wenches, here's an end of us because of your fool's madness," groaned Brusul as he caught up. "If those drylanders find us out, we'll make fine sport for them."

Khal Kan grinned at the brawny warrior and the wizened little spy. "We'll not stay long. Just long enough to see what she looks like—this Golden Wings the desert tribes all rave about."

They rode forward over the ocher desert. The huge red orb of the sun was full in their faces as it sank toward the west. Already, the two moons Qui and Quilus were rising like dull pink shields in the east.

Shadows lengthened colossal across the yellow sands. The wind was keen, blowing from the far polar lands of this world of Thar. Behind them rose the vast, dull red shoulders of the Dragal Mountains, that separated the drylands from their own coastal country of Jotanland.

A nomad town rose ahead, scores of flat-topped pavilions of woven black *hyrk*-hair. Great herds of horses of the black desert strain were under the care of whooping herdsboys. Smoke of fires rose along the streets.

Fierce, swarthy drylanders whose skins were darker than the bronze faces of Khal Kan and his companions, looked at the trio with narrowed eyes as they rode in. Dryland warriors fell in behind them, riding casually after them toward the big pavilion at the camp's center.

"We're nicely in the trap," grunted Brusul. "Now only wit will get us out. Which means we can't depend on you, Khal Kan."

Khal Kan laughed. "A good sword can take a man where wit will stumble. Remember, now, we're from Kaubos."

They dismounted outside the great pavilion and walked into it past cat-eyed dryland sentries.

Torches spilled a red flare over the interior of the big tent. Here along rows, on their mats, sat the chiefs of the desert folk, feasting, drinking and quarreling.

UPON a low dais sat old Bladomir, their highest chief. The old desert ruler was a bearded, steel-eyed warrior of sixty whose yellow skin was grizzled by sandstorm and sun. His curved sword leaned against his knee, and he was drinking from a flagon of purple Lurian wine.

Khal Kan's eyes flew to the girl sitting beside the chief. He felt disappointment. Was this the famous Golden Wings, this small, slight, slender dark-haired girl in black leather? Why, she was nothing much —mildly attractive with her smooth black hair and fine, golden-skinned features—but not as pretty by half as many a wench he knew.

The girl looked up. Her eyes met Khal Kan's. The stab of those midnight-black eyes was like the impact of sword-shock. For a moment, the Jotan prince glimpsed a spirit thrilling as a lightning-flash.

"Why, I see *now* why they rave about her!" he thought delightedly. "She's a

tiger-cat, dangerous as hell and twice as beautiful!"

Golden Wings' black brows drew together angrily at the open, insolent admiration on the face of Khal Kan. She spoke to her father.

Bladomir looked down frowningly at the tall, grinning young warrior and his two companions.

"Watermen!" grunted the dryland chief contemptuously, using the desert-folk's name for the coast peoples. "What do you want here?"

"We're from Kaubos," Brusul answered quickly. "We had to leave there when the Bunts took our city last year. Being men without a country now, we thought we'd offer our swords to you."

Bladomir spat. "We of the desert don't need to hire swords. You can have tent-hospitality tonight. Tomorrow, be gone."

It was what Khal Kan had expected. He was hardly listening. His eyes, insolent in admiration, had never left the girl Golden Wings.

A shrill voice yelled from the drylanders feasting in the big torchlit tent. A thin, squint-eyed desert warrior had jumped to his feet and was pointing at Khal Kan.

"That's no Kaubian!" he cried. "It's the prince of Jotan! I saw him with the king his father, two years ago in Jotan city!"

Khal Kan's sword sang out of its sheath with blurring speed—but too late. Drylanders had leaped on the three instantly, pinioning their arms. Old Bladomir arose, his hawk-eyes narrowing ominously.

"So you're that hell's brand, young Khal Kan of Jotan?" he snarled. "Spying on us, are you?"

Khal Kan answered coolly. "We're not spying on you. My father sent us into the Dragals to see if the Bunts were in the mountains. He feared that traitor Egir might lead the green men north that way."

"Then what are you doing here in our camp?" Bladomir demanded.

Khal Kan looked calmly at the girl. "I'd heard of your daughter and wanted to look at her, to see if she was all they say."

Golden Wing's black eyes flared, but her voice was silky. "And now that you have looked, Jotanian, do you approve?"

Khal Kan laughed. "Yes, I do. I think you're a tiger-cat as would make me a fit mate. I shall do you the honor of making you princess of Jotan."

Swords of a score of dryland warriors flashed toward the three captives, as the desert warriors leaped to avenge the insult.

"Wait!" called Golden Wings' clear voice. There was a glint of mocking humor in her black eyes as she looked down at Khal Kan. "No swords for this princeling—the whip's more suited to him. Tie him up."

A roar of applause went up from the drylanders. In a moment, Khal Kan had been strung up to a tent-pole, his hands dragged up above his head. His leather jacket was ripped off and his yellow shirt torn away.

Brusul, bound and helpless, was roaring like a trapped lion as he saw what was coming. A tall drylander with a lash had come.

Swish—*crack!* Roar of howling laughter crashed on the echo, as Khal Kan felt the leather bite into his flesh. He winced inwardly from the pain, but kept his insolent smile unchanged.

Again the lash cracked. And on its echo came the voice of Golden Wings, silvery and taunting.

"Do you still want me for a mate, princeling?"

"More than ever," laughed Khan Kan. "I wouldn't have a wench without spirit."

"More!" flashed Golden Wings' furious voice to the flogger.

The lash hissed and exploded in red pain along Khal Kan's back. Still he would not flinch or wince. His mind was doggedly set.

Through crimson pain-mists came the girl's voice again. "You have thought better of your desire now, Jotanian?"

Khal Kan heard his own laughter as a harsh, remote sound. "Not in the least, darling. For every lash-stroke you order now, you'll seek later to win my forgiveness with a hundred kisses."

"Twenty more strokes!" flared the girl's hot voice.

The whole world seemed pure pain to Khal Kan, and his back was a numbed torment, but he kept his face immobile. He was aware that the fierce laughter had ceased, that the dryland warriors were watching him in a silence tinged with respect.

The lashes ceased. Khal Kan jeered over his shoulder.

"What, no more? I thought you had more spirit, my sweet."

Golden Wings' voice was raging. "There's still whips for you unless you beg pardon for your insolence."

"No, no more," rumbled old Bladomir. "This princeling's wit-struck, it's plain to see. Tie them all up tightly and we'll send to Jotan demanding heavy ransom for them."

Khal Kan hardly felt them carrying him away to a dark, small tent, his body was so bathed in pain. He did feel the gasping agony of the jolt as he was flung down beside Brusul and Zoor.

THEY three, bound hand and foot with thongs of tough sand-cat leather, were left in the tent by guards who posted themselves outside.

"What a girl!" exclaimed Khal Kan. "Brusul, for the first time in my life, I've met a woman who isn't all tears and weakness."

"You're wit-struck, indeed!" flared Brusul. "I'd as lief fall in love with a sand-cat as that wench. And look at the mess you've got us into here! Your father awaiting our report — and we prisoned here. Faugh!"

"We'll get out of this some way," muttered Khal Kan. He felt a reaction of exhaustion. "Tomorrow will bring counsel—"

He heard Brusul grumbling on, but he was drifting now into sleep.

Golden Wings' face floated before him as sleep overtook him. He felt again the strong emotion with which the dryland girl had inspired him.

Then he was asleep, and was beginning to dream. It was the same dream as always that came quickly to Khal Kan.

He dreamed, first, that he was *awaking*—

HE WAS awaking—in fact, he was now awake. He yawned, opened his eyes, and lay looking up at the white-papered bedroom ceiling.

He knew, as always, that he was no longer Khal Kan, prince of Jotan. He knew that he was now Henry Stevens, of Midland City, Illinois.

Henry Stevens lay looking up at the ceiling of his neat maple bedroom, and thinking of the dream he had just had—the dream in which, as Khal Kan, he had been flogged by the drylanders.

"I've got myself in a real fix, now," Henry muttered. "How am I going to get back to Jotan? But that girl Golden Wings *is* a darling—"

Beside him, his wife's plump figure stirred drowsily. "What is it, Henry?" she asked sleepily.

"Nothing, Emma," he replied dutifully. He swung out of bed. "You don't need to get up. I'll get my own breakfast."

On slippered feet, Henry Stevens plodded across the neat bedroom. As he carefully shaved, his mind was busy with remote things.

"Even if Jotan can pay the ransom, it'll be a week before I can get back there," he

thought. "And who knows what the Bunts will be up to in that time?"

Out of the mirror, his own newly-shaven face regarded him. It was the thin, commonplace face of Henry Stevens, thirty-year-old insurance official of Midland City —a face far different from Khal Kan's hard, bronzed, merry visage.

"I suppose I'm crazy to worry about Jotan, when it may be all a dream," Henry muttered thoughtfully. "Or is it *this* that's the dream, after all? Will I ever know?"

He was facing the mystery that had baffled him all his life.

Was Khal Kan a dream—or was Henry Stevens the dream?

All his life, Henry Stevens had been beset by that riddle. It was one that had begun with his earliest childish memories.

As far back as he could remember, Henry had had the dream. As a child, he had every night dreamed that he was a child in a different world far removed from Midland City.

Each night, when little Henry Stevens had lain down to sleep, he had at once slipped into the dream. In that dream, he was a boy in the city Jotan, on the shore of the Zambrian Sea, on the world of Thar. He was Khal Kan, prince of Jotan, son of the king, Kan Abul.

All through his years of youth and manhood, the dream had persisted. Every night, as soon as he slept, he dreamed that he was *awaking*. And then, in the dream, he seemed to be Khal Kan again. As Khal Kan, he lived through the day on Thar. And when Khal Kan lay down to sleep, *he* dreamed that he awoke as Henry Stevens, of Earth!

The dream was continuous. There was nothing incoherent or jerky about it. Day followed day consecutively in the life of Khal Kan, as logically as in the life of Henry Stevens.

Henry Stevens grew up through boyhood and youth, attending his school and playing his games and going off to college, and finally getting a job with the insurance company, and marrying.

And each night, in Henry's dream Khal Kan was similarly pursuing *his* life—was learning to ride and wield a sword, and explore the mountains west of Jotanland, and go forth in patrol expeditions against the hated Bunts of the south who were the great enemies of Jotan.

When he was awake and living the life of Henry Stevens, it always seemed to him that Khal Kan and his colorful, dangerous world of Thar were nothing but an extraordinarily vivid dream. All that world, with its strange cities and enormous mountains and forests and alien races, its turquoise seas and crimson sun, were surely nothing but dream.

That was how it seemed to Henry Stevens. But when he was Khal Kan, in the nightly dream, it was exactly the opposite. Then it seemed to Khal Kan that Henry Stevens and his strange world of Earth were the dream.

Khal Kan seldom doubted that. The hardy young prince of Jotan knew there could be no such world as this Earth he dreamed about each night. A world where he was a timid little man who worked with papers at a desk all day long, a world where men dressed and acted differently, where even the sun was not red but yellow. Surely, Khal Kan thought, that could be nothing but a dream that somehow had oppressed him all his life.

Henry Stevens was not so sure about which was real. There were many times when it seemed to Henry that maybe Thar *was* the real world, and that Earth and Henry Stevens were the dream.

They couldn't both be real! One of these existences of his must be the real one, and the other a strange continued dream. But *which?*

"If I only knew that," Henry muttered to his reflection in the mirror. "Then,

whichever one is the dream, wouldn't bother me much—I'd know that it wasn't real, whatever happened."

He looked ruefully at himself. "As it is, I've got two lives to worry about. Not that Khal Kan does much worrying!"

His puzzled reverie was broken by the sleepy voice of his wife, calling a mechanical warning from the bedroom.

"Henry, you'd better hurry or you'll be late at the office."

"Yes, Emma," he replied dutifully, and hastened his toilet.

He loved his wife. At least, Henry Stevens loved her—whether or not Henry was real.

BUT Golden Wings! There was a girl! His pulse still raced as he remembered her beauty, when he had seen her through Khal Kan's eyes.

How the devil was Khal Kan going to get out of the trap into which the girl's beauty had led him?

He couldn't guess what the reckless young prince would do—for Khal Kan and Henry Stevens had nothing in common in their personalities.

"Oh, forget it!" Henry advised himself irritably. "Thar *must* be a dream. Let Khal Kan worry about it, when the dream comes back tonight."

But he couldn't forget so easily. As he drove to town in his sedate black coupé, he kept turning the problem over in his mind. And he found himself brooding about it that afternoon over his statements, at his desk in the big insurance office.

If Khal Kan didn't get away, his father might send an expedition out of Jotan to search for him. And that would weaken Jotan at a time when the Bunts were menacing it. He must—

"Stevens, haven't you finished that Blaine statement yet?" demanded a loud voice beside his desk.

Henry started guiltily. It was Carson, the wasp-like little office manager, who stood glowering down at him.

"I—I was just starting it," Henry said hastily, grabbing the neglected papers.

"Just starting it?" Carson's thin lips tightened. "Stevens, you've got to pull yourself up. You're getting entirely too dreamy and inefficient lately. I see you sitting here and staring at the wall for hours. What's the matter with you, anyway?"

"Nothing, Mr. Carson," Henry said panically. Then he amended, "I've had a few troubles on my mind lately. But I won't let them interfere with my work again."

"I wouldn't, if I were you," advised the waspish little man ominously, and departed.

Henry felt a cold chill. There had been a significant glitter in Carson's spectacled eyes. He sensed himself on the verge of a terrifying precipice—of losing his job.

"If I don't forget about Thar, I *will* be in trouble," he muttered to himself. "I can't go on this way."

As he mechanically added figures, he was alarmedly trying to figure out a way to rid himself of this obsession.

If he only knew which was reality and which was dream! That was what his mind always came back to, that was the key of his troubles.

If, for instance, he could learn for a certainty that Khal Kan and his life in Thar were merely a dream, as they seemed, then he wouldn't brood about them. There wouldn't be any point in worrying about what happened in a dream.

On the other hand, if he should learn that his life as Khal Kan was real, and that Henry Stevens and his world were the dream, then that too would relieve his worries. It wouldn't matter much if Henry Stevens lost his job—if Henry were only a dream.

Henry was fascinated, as always, by that

thought. He looked around the sunlit office, the neat desks and busy men and girls, with a flash of derisive superiority.

"You may none of you be real at all," he thought. "You may all just be part of Khal Kan's nightly dream."

That was always a queer thought, that idea that Earth and all its people, including himself, were just a dream of the prince of Jotan.

"I wish to heaven I knew," Henry muttered baffledly for the thousandth time. "There must be some way to find out which is real."

Yet he could see no test that would give proof. He had thought of and had tried many things during his life, to test the matter.

Several times, he had stayed up all night without sleep. He had thought that if he did not sleep and hence did not dream, it would break the continuity of the dream-life of Khal Kan.

But it had had no effect. For when he finally did sleep, and dreamed that he awoke as Khal Kan, it merely seemed to Khal Kan that he had dreamed he was Henry Stevens, staying up a night without sleep—that he had dreamed *two* days and a night of the unreal life of Henry Stevens.

No, that had failed as a test. Nor was there any other way. If he could be sure that while he was sleeping and living the dream-life of Khal Kan, the rest of Earth remained real—that would solve the problem.

The other people of Earth were sure they had remained in existence during his sleep. But, if they were all just figments of dream, their certainty of existence was merely part of the dream.

It was maddening, this uncertainty! He felt that it would drive him to insanity if the puzzle persisted much longer. Yet how was he to solve the riddle?

"Maybe a good psychoanalyst," Henry thought doubtfully. "A fellow like that might be able to help."

He shrank from his own idea. It would mean telling the psychoanalyst all about his dream-life. And that was something he had not done for years, not since he was a small boy.

When he was a boy, Henry Stevens had confidently told his family and chums all about his strange dreams—how each night when he slept he was another boy, the boy Khal Kan in Jotan, on the world Thar. He had told them in detail of his life as Khal Kan, of the wonderful black city Jotan, of the red sun and the two pink moons.

His parents had at first laughed at his stories, then had become worried, and finally had forbidden him to tell any more such falsehoods. They had put it all down to a too-vivid imagination.

And his boyhood chums had jeered at his tales, admiring his ability as a liar but rudely expressing their opinions when he had earnestly maintained that he did dream it all, every night.

So Henry had learned not to tell of his dream-life. He had kept that part of his life locked away, and even Emma had never heard of it.

"But still, if a psychoanalyst could help me find out *which* is real," he thought desperately, "it'd be worth trying—"

THAT afternoon when his work was finished, Henry found himself entering the offices of a Doctor Willis Thorn whom he had heard of as the best psychoalanlyst in the city. He had made an appointment by telephone.

Doctor Thorn was a solidly built man of forty, with the body of a football player, and calm, friendly eyes. He listened with quiet attention as Henry Stevens, slowly at first and then more eagerly, poured out his story.

"And you say the dream continues log-

ically, from night to night?" Doctor Thorn asked. "That's strange. I've never heard of a psychosis quite like that."

"What I want to know is—which is real?" Henry blurted. "Is there any way in which you could tell me whether it's Thar or Earth that's real?"

Doctor Thorn smiled quietly. "I'm not a figment of a dream, I assure you. You see me sitting here, quite real and solid. *Too* solid, I'm afraid—I've been putting on weight lately."

Henry, puzzledly thoughtful, missed the pleasantry. "You seem real and solid," he admitted, "and so does this office and everything else, to me. But then I, Henry Stevens, may only be a part of the dream myself—Khal Kan's dream."

Doctor Thorn's brow wrinkled. "I see your point. It's logical enough, from a certain standpoint. But it's also logical that you and I and Earth are real, and that Khal Kan and his world are only an extraordinarily vivid dream your mind has developed as compensation for a monotonous life."

"I don't know," Henry muttered. "When I'm Khal Kan, I'm pretty sure that Henry Stevens is just a dream. But I, Henry Stevens, am not so sure. Of course, Khal Kan isn't the kind of man to brood or doubt much about anything — he's a fighter and reckless adventurer."

Doctor Thorn was definitely interested. "Look here, Mr. Stevens, suppose you write out a complete history of this dream-life of yours—this life as Khal Kan—and bring it with you the next time. It may help me."

Henry left the office, with his new hope on the wane. He didn't think the psychoanalyst could do much to solve his problem.

After all, he thought depressedly as he drove homeward, there was hardly any way in which you could prove that you really existed. You felt you did exist, everyone around you was sure they did too, but there was no real proof that that whole existence was not just a dream.

His mind came back to Khal Kan's present predicament. How was he going to escape from the drylanders? He brooded on that, through dinner.

"Henry Stevens, you haven't been listening to one word!" his wife's voice aroused him.

Emma's plump, good-natured face was a little exasperated as she peered across the table at him.

"I declare, you're getting more dopey every day!" she told him snappily.

"I'm just sleepy, I guess," Henry apologized. "I think I'll turn in."

She shook her head. "You go to bed earlier every night. It's not eight o'clock yet."

Henry finally was permitted to retire. He felt an apprehensive eagerness as he undressed. What was going to happen to Khal Kan?

He stretched out and lay in the dark room, half dreading and half anticipating the coming of sleep. Finally the dark tide of drowsiness began to roll across his mind.

He knew vaguely that he was falling asleep. He slipped into darkness. And, as always, the dream came at once. As always, he dreamed that he was awaking—

KHAL KAN awoke, in the dark, cold tent. His whole back was a throbbing pain, and his bound arms and legs were numb.

He lay thinking a moment of his dream. How real it always seemed, the nightly dream in which he was a timid little man named Henry Stevens, on a queer, drab world called Earth! When he was dreaming—when he was the man Henry Stevens—he even thought that he, Khal Kan, was a dream!

Dreams within dreams—but they meant

nothing. Khal Kan had long ago quit worrying about his strange dream-life. The wise men of Jotan whom he had consulted had spoken doubtfully of witchcraft. Their explanations had explained nothing. And life was too short, there were too many enemies to slay and girls to kiss and flagons to drink, to worry much about dreams.

"But *this* is no dream, worse luck!" thought Khal Kan, testing his bonds. "The prince of Jotan, trussed up like a damned *byrk*—"

He stiffened. A shadow was moving toward him in the dark tent. It bent over him and there was a muffled flash of steel. Amazedly, Khal Kan felt the bonds of his wrists and ankles relax. They had been cut.

The shadow sniggered. "What would you do without little Zoor to take care of you, Prince?"

"Zoor?" Khal Kan's whisper was astonished. "How in the name of—"

"Easily, Prince," sniggered Zoor. "I always carry a flat blade in the sole of my sandal. But it took me all night to get it out and cut myself free. It's almost dawn."

The cold in the tent was piercing. Through a crack in the flap, Khal Kan could see the eastern sky beginning to pale a little. He could also hear the drylanders on guard out there, shuffling to keep warm.

Khal Kan got to his feet while Zoor was freeing Brusul. Then the little man used his sliver of steel to slice a rip through the back wall of the tent. They three slipped out into the starry darkness.

Khal Kan chuckled a little to himself as he remembered how his dream-self—the man Henry Stevens in that dream-world—had worried about his plight. As though there was anything worth worrying about in that.

They did not stop for a whispered consultation until they were well away from the tent in which they had been kept. The whole camp of the drylanders was still, except for an occasional drunken warrior staggering between the dark tents, and the stamping of tethered horses not far away.

"The horses are this way," muttered Brusul. "We can be over the Dragals before these swart-skinned devils know we're gone."

"Wait!" commanded Khal Kan's whisper. "I'm not going without that girl, Golden Wings."

"Hell take your obstinacy!" snarled Brusul. "Do you think you can steal the drylanders' princess right out of their camp? They'd chase us to the end of the world. Beside, what would you want with that little desert-cat who had you flogged raw?"

Khal Kan uttered a low laugh. "She's the only wench I've ever seen who was more than a sweet armful for an idle hour. She's flame and steel and beauty—and by the sun, I'm taking her. You two get horses and wait by the edge of the camp yonder. I'll be along."

He hastened away before they could voice the torrent of objections on their lips. He had taken Zoor's hiltless knife.

Khal Kan made his way through the dark tents to the big pavilion of the dryland chief. He silently skirted its rear wall, stopping here and there to slash the wall and peer inside.

Thus he discovered the compartment of the pavilion in which the girl slept. It had a guttering copper night-lamp whose flickering radiance fell on silken hangings and on a low mass of cushions on which she lay.

Golden Wings' dark head was pillowed on her arm, her long black lashes slumbering on her cheek. Coolly, Khal Kan made an entrance. He delayed to cut strips from the silken hangings, and then approached her.

His big hand whipped the silken gag around Golden Wings' mouth and tied it before she was half-awake. Her eyes blaz-

ing raging as she recognized him, and her slim silken figure struggled in his grasp with wildcat fury.

Khal Kan was rough and fast. He got the silken bonds around her hands and feet, and then drew a breath of relief.

"Now we ride for Jotan, my sweet," he whispered mockingly to her as he picked up her helpless figure.

Golden Wings' black eyes blazed into his own, and he laughed.

He kissed her eyelids. "This will have to serve as proof of my affections until we can take this damned gag off, my dear," he mocked.

HER firm body writhed furiously in his grasp as he went out into the starry night. Silently, bearing the girl easily, he made his way through the sleeping camp.

Stamping shadows loomed up at the camp edge, awaiting him. Brusul and Zoor had horses, and the little spy handed Khal Kan a stolen sword.

"You have the girl!" Zoor sniggered. "Even I could not make a theft so daring —to steal the drylanders' princess out of their own camp!"

"We haven't got her out yet, and it's far to Jotan," snarled Brusul. "Let's get out of here."

Khal Kan vaulted into the saddle and drew Golden Wings' struggling silken figure across the saddle-bow. They walked their horses softly eastward till they were out of earshot of the camp, and then they spurred into a gallop.

The cold dawn wind whistled past Khal Kan's face. Far ahead, the black bulk of the Dragals loomed against the paling sky.

He took the gag from Golden Wings' mouth. In the growing light, the cold anger of the girl's face flared at him.

"Dog of Jotan!" she panted. "You'll be staked out in the desert to die the sun-death, for this crime."

"I didn't free your mouth for words, my dear," replied Khal Kan. "But for this—"

Her lips writhed under his kiss. His laughter pealed back on the wind as he straightened again in the saddle.

Golden Wings sobbed with rage. "You'll not be killed at once," she promised breathlessly. "It will take time to think up a death appropriate for you. Even the sun-death would be too easy."

"That's the way I like to hear a girl talk," applauded Khal Kan. "Hell take these wenches who are all softness and whimpers. We'll get along, my pet."

They were still far from the first ridges of the Dragals when the crimson sun came up to light their way. Brusul turned his battered face back to stare across the ocher sands, and then swore and pointed to a remote, low wisp of dust back on the western horizon.

"There they come! They're following our tracks, curse them!"

"We can lose them when we reach the mountains," Khal Kan called easily. "Faster!"

"You'll never reach the Dragals," taunted Golden Wings, eyes sparkling now. "My father's horses are swift, Jotan dogs!"

They spurred on. The first low red ridges of the Dragals seemed tantalizingly far away. The sun was rising higher, and its blistering heat had already dispelled the coolness of dawn.

The crimson orb hung almost directly overhead, and they were still hours from the ridges, when Zoor's pony tripped and went down. It rolled with a broken neck as the little man darted nimbly from the saddle.

Khal Kan reined up and came riding back. The dust-cloud of their pursuers was ominously big and close.

"Ride on!" Zoor cried, his wizened face unperturbed. "You can make the ridges without me."

"We can't make them," Khal Kan denied coolly. "And it's not our way to separate in face of danger."

He dismounted. Golden Wings was looking westward with exultation in her black eyes. "Did I not tell you I'd see you caught!" she cried.

Khal Kan cut free her hands and feet. He reached up and set his lips against hers, bruisingly. Then he stepped back, releasing her.

"You can ride back and meet your father's warriors with the glad news that we're here for the taking, my sweet," he told her.

"You're letting her go?" yelled Brusul. "We could hold her hostage."

"No," declared Khal Kan. "I'll not see her harmed in the fight."

He laughed up at her, as she sat in the saddle looking down at him with wide, strangely bewildered eyes.

"Too bad I couldn't get you to Jotan with me, my little desert-cat. But you'll have the pleasure of seeing us killed. Tell your father's warriors to come with their swords out!"

FOR a long moment, Golden Wings looked down at him. Then she set spur to the pony and galloped away to the oncoming dust-cloud.

Khal Kan and his two comrades drew their swords and waited. And soon they saw the force of a hundred drylanders riding up to them. Bladomir was in the lead, his beard bristling. And Golden Wings rode beside him.

"The little hell-cat wants to help kill us," growled Brusul. "You should have slit her throat."

Khal Kan shrugged. "I'd liefer slit my own. Too bad we have to end in a skirmish like this, old friends. I dragged you into it."

"Oh, it's all right, except that we won't be with the armies of Jotan when they go out to meet Egir and the Bunts," muttered Brusul.

The drylanders were not charging. No sword was unsheathed as they came forward, though old Bladomir was frowning blackly. The desert chieftain halted his horse ten paces away, and spoke to Khal Kan in a roaring voice.

"I ought to kill you all, Jotanians, for taking my daughter away with you. But we're a free people. Since she says she goes with you of her own free will, I'll not interfere."

"Of her own free will?" gasped Brusul. "What in the sun's name—"

GOLDEN WINGS had dismounted and came toward Khal Kan. Her dark eyes met him levelly. She did not speak, nor did he, as she took his hand.

Bladomir laid a sword-blade across their clasped hands, and tossed a handful of the yellow desert sand upon it. Khal Kan felt his heart in his throat. It was the marriage rite of the drylanders.

Zoor and Brusul were staring unbelievingly, the drylanders sadly. But Golden Wings' red lips were sweet fire under his mouth.

"You said that for each lash-stroke last night, I'd pay a hundred kisses," she whispered. "That will take long—my lord."

He looked earnestly into the brooding sweetness of her face. "No deceptions between us, my little sand-cat!" he said. "When I freed you and let you go to your father, I was gambling that you'd come back—like this."

For a moment her eyes flared surprise and anger. And then she laughed. "No deceptions, my lord! Last night, in my father's pavilion, I knew you were the mate I'd long awaited. But—I thought the lashing would teach you to value me the more!"

Bladomir had mounted his horse. The stoical old desert chieftain and his men

called their farewells, and then rode back westward.

They had left horse and sword for Golden Wings. She rode knee to knee with Khal Kan as they spurred up the sloping sands toward the first red ridges of the Dragals.

Dusk came upon them hours later as they climbed the steep pass toward the highest ridge of the range. One of the pink moons was up and the other was rising. The desert was a vague unreality far behind and below.

"Look back and you can see the campfires of your people," he told the girl.

Her dark head did not turn. "My people are ahead now, in Jotan."

They topped the ridge. A yell of horror burst from Brusul.

"The Bunts are in Galoon! Hell take the green devils—they've marched leagues north in the last two days!"

Khal Kan's fierce rage choked him as he too saw. Far, far to the east beneath the rosy moons, the lowland plain below the Dragals stretched out to the silvery immensity of the Zambrian Sea.

Down there to the right, on the coast, should have shone the bright lights of the city Galoon, southern most port of Jotanland.

But instead the city was scarred by hideous red fires, that smoldered through the night like baleful, unwinking eyes.

"Egir's led the green men farther north than I dreamed!" Khal Kan muttered. "Oh, damn that traitor! If I had my sword at his throat—"

"We'd best ride hard for Jotan before we're cut off," Zoor cried.

They rode north along the ridges, until the red fires of burning Galoon receded from sight. Then they moved down the western slopes of the mountains, and galloped on north along the easier coast road.

Galloping under the rosy moons, Khal Kan pointed far along the shore to a yellow beacon-fire atop the lighthouse tower outside Jotan.

The square black towers of Jotan loomed sheer on the edge of the silver sea, surrounded by the high black wall which had only two openings—a big water-gate on the sea side, and a smaller gate on the other. The rosy moonlight glinted off the arms of sentries posted thick on the wall, and a sharp challenge was flung down as Khal Kan rode up to the closed gate.

Joyful cries greeted the disclosure of his identity. The gates ground slowly open, and he and Golden Wings galloped in with Brusul and Zoor. Khal Kan led the way through the black-paved stone streets of Jotan to the low, brooding mass of the palace.

When, with Golden Wings' hand in his, he hurried into the great domed, torchlit marble Hall of the Kings, he found his father awaiting him.

Kan Abul's iron-hard face seemed even grimmer than usual.

"The Bunts—" Khal Kan began, but the king finished for him.

"I know—the green men have captured and sacked Galoon, led by my traitorous brother. We've been gathering our forces. Tomorrow we march south to attack—it's good you're in time to join us. But who's this?"

Khal Kan grinned. "I found no Bunts over the Dragals, but I did find a princess for Jotan. They call her Golden Wings—Bladomir's daughter."

Kan Abul grunted. "A dryland princess? Well, you've made a bad bargain, girl—this son of mine's an empty-skulled rascal. And tomorrow he goes south with us to battle."

"And I go with him!" declared Golden Wings. "Do you think I'm one of your Jotan girls that cannot ride or fight?"

Khal Kan laughed. "We'll argue that the morrow."

Later that night, in his great chamber of

seaward windows, with Golden Wings sleeping in his arms, Khal Kan also slept—

HENRY STEVENS brooded as he sat waiting in the office of the psychoanalyst, the next afternoon. Things couldn't go on this way! He'd been reprimanded twice this day by Carson for neglect of his work.

Since he'd awakened this morning, the danger to Jotan had been obsessing his thoughts.

It was queer, but he had had more time to reflect upon the peril than had Khal Kan himself in the dream.

"You can go in now, Mr. Stevens," smiled the receptionist.

Doctor Thorn's alert young eyes caught the haggardness of Henry's face but he was casual as he pushed cigarettes across the desk.

"You had the same dream last night?" he asked Henry.

Henry Stevens nodded. "Yes, and things are getting worse—over there in Thar. The Bunts have taken Galoon in some way, and Egir must be planning to lead them on against Jotan."

"Egir?" questioned the psychoanalyst.

Henry explained. "Egir was my—I mean Khal Kan's — uncle, the younger brother of Kan Abul. He's a renegade to Jotan. He fled from there about—let's see, about four Thar years ago, after Kan Abul discovered his plot to usurp the throne. Since then, he's been conspiring with the Bunts."

Henry took a pencil and drew a little map on a sheet of paper. It showed a curving, crescent-like coast.

"This is the Zambrian Sea," he explained. "On the north of this indented gulf is Jotan, my city—I mean, Khal Kan's city. Away to the south here across the gulf is Buntland, where the barbarian green men live. On the coast between Buntland and Jotan are the independent city of Kaubos and the southernmost Jotanian city of Galoon.

"When my uncle Egir fled to the Bunts," Henry went on earnestly, "he stirred them up to attack Kaubos, which they captured. We've been planning an expedition to drive them out of there. Five days ago I rode over the Dragal Mountains with two comrades to reconnoiter a possible route by which we could make a surprise march south. But now the Bunts are moving north and have sacked Galoon. There's a big battle coming—"

Henry paused embarrassedly. He had suddenly awakened from his intense interest in exposition to become aware that Doctor Thorn was not looking at the map, but at his face.

"I know it all sounds crazy, to talk about a dream this way," Henry mumbled. "But I can't help worrying about Jotan. You see, if it turned out that Thar was real and that *this* was the dream—"

He broke off again, and then finished with an earnest plea. "That's why I *must* know which is real—Thar or Earth, Khal Kan or myself!"

Doctor Thorn considered gravely. The young psychiatrist did not ridicule Henry's bafflement, as he had half expected.

"Look at it from my point of view," Thorn proposed. "You think it's possible that I may be only a figment in a world dreamed by Khal Kan each night. But I know that I'm real, though I can't very well prove it."

"That's it," Henry murmured discouragedly. "People always take for granted that this world is real—they never even imagine that it may be just a dream. But none of them could prove that it isn't a dream."

"But suppose you could prove that Thar *is* a dream?" Thorn pursued. "Then you'd know that this must be the real existence."

Henry considered. "That's true. But how can I do that?"

"I want you to take this memory across into the dream-life with you tonight," Doctor Thorn said earnestly. "I want you, when you awake as Khal Kan, to say over and over to yourself—'This isn't real. I'm not real. Henry Stevens and Earth are the reality'."

"You think that will have some effect?" Henry asked doubtfully.

"I think that in time your dream-world will begin to fade, if you keep saying that," the psychoanalyst declared.

"Well, I'll try it," Henry promised thoughtfully. "If it has any effect, I'll be sure then that Thar is the dream."

Doctor Thorn remarked, "Probably the best thing to happen would be if Khal Kan got himself killed in that dream-life. Then, the moment before he 'died,' the dream of Thar would vanish utterly as always in such dreams."

Henry was a little appalled. "You mean —Thar and Jotan and Golden Wings and all the rest would be gone forever?"

"That's right—you wouldn't ever again be oppressed by the dream," encouraged the psychoanalyst.

Henry Stevens felt a chill as he drove homeward. That was something he hadn't forseen, that the death of Khal Kan in that other life would destroy Thar forever if Thar was the dream.

Henry didn't want that. He had spent just as much of his life in Thar, as Khal Kan, as he had done here on Earth. No matter if that life should turn out to be merely a dream, it was real and vivid, and he didn't want to see it utterly destroyed.

He felt a little panic as he pictured himself cut off from Thar forever, never again riding with Brusul and Zoor on crazy adventure, never seeing again that brooding smile in Golden Wings' eyes, nor the towers of Jotan brooding under the rosy moons.

Life as Henry Stevens of Earth, without his nightly existence in Thar, would be tame and profitless. Yet he knew that he *must* once and for all settle the question of which of his lives was real, even though it risked destroying one of those lives.

"I'll do what Doctor Thorn said, when I'm Khal Kan tonight," Henry muttered. "I'll tell myself Thar isn't real, and see if it has any effect."

He was so strung up by anticipation of the test he was about to make, that he paid even less attention than usual to Emma's placid account of neighborhood gossip and small household happenings.

That night as he lay, waiting for sleep, Henry repeated over and over to himself the formula that he must repeat as Khal Kan. His last waking thought, as he drifted into sleep, was of that.

KHAL KAN awoke with a vague sense of some duty oppressing his mind. There was something he must do, or say—

He opened his eyes, to look with contentment upon the dawn-lit interior of his own black stone chamber in the great palace at Jotan. On the wall were his favorite weapons—the sword with which he'd killed a sea-dragon when he was fourteen years old, the battered shield with the great scar which he had borne in his first real battle.

Golden Wings stirred sleepily against him, her perfumed black hair brushing his cheek. He patted her head with rough tenderness. Then he became aware of the tramp of many feet outside, of distant clank of arms and hard voices barking orders, and rattle of hurrying hoofs.

His pulse leaped. "Today we go south to meet Egir and the Bunts!"

Then he remembered what it was that dimly oppressed his mind. It was something from his dream—the queer nightly dream in which he was the timid little man Henry Stevens on that strange world called Earth.

He remembered now that Henry Stev-

ens had promised a doctor that he would say aloud, "Thar isn't real—I, Khal Kan, am not real."

Khal Kan laughed. The idea of saying such a thing, of asserting that Thar and Jotan and everything else was not real, seemed idiotic.

"That timid little man I am in the dream each night—he thinks I would mouth such folly as that!" Khal Kan chuckled.

Golden Wings had awakened. Her slumbrous black eyes regarded him questioningly.

"It's my own private joke, sweet," he told her. And he went on to tell her of the nightly dream he had had since childhood, of a queer world called Earth in which he was another man. "It's the maddest world you can imagine, my pet—that dream-world. Men don't even wear swords, they don't know how to ride or fight like men, and they spend their lives plotting in stuffy rooms for a thing they call 'money'—bits of paper and metal.

"And the cream of the joke," Khal Kan laughed, "is that in my dream, I even doubt whether Thar is real. The dream-me believes that maybe *this* is the dream, that Jotan and Brusul and Zoor and even you are but phantom visions of my sleeping brain."

HE ROSE to his feet. "Enough of dreams and visions. Today we ride to meet Egir and the Bunts. *That* is no dream!"

Ten thousand strong massed the fighting-men of Jotan later that morning, outside the walls of the city. Under the red sun their bronzed faces were sternly confident and eager for battle.

Kan Abul rode out through their ranks, with his captains behind him in full armor. Khal Kan was among them, and beside him rode Golden Wings. The desert princess had fiercely refused to be left behind.

Their helmets flashed in the red sunlight, and the cheers of the troops were deafening as Kan Abul spoke to his captains.

"Egir's main force is already ten leagues north of Galoon," he told them. "There's talk of some new weapon which the Bunts have, with which they claim to be invincible. So we're going to take them by surprise.

"I'll lead our main force of eight thousand archers and spearmen south along the coast road," the king continued. "My son, you will take our two thousand horsemen and ride over the first ridge of the Dragals, then ride south ten leagues. We'll join battle with the Bunts down on the coastal plain, and you can come down from the Dragals and strike their flank. And the gods will be against us if we don't roll them up and destroy them as our forefathers did, generations ago."

Kan Abul led the troops down the coast road, and as they marched along they roared out the old fighting-song of Jotan.

"The Bunts came up to Jotan,
Long ago!"

Hours later, Khal Kan sat his horse amid a thin screen of brush high in the red easternmost ridge of the Dragals, leagues south of Jotan. Golden Wings sat her pony beside him, and their two thousand horsemen waited below the concealment of the ridge.

Down there below them, the red slopes dropped into a narrow plain between the mountains and the blue Zambrian. Far southward, a pall of black smoke marked the site of sacked Galoon. And from there, something like a glittering snake was crawling north along the coast.

"My Uncle Egir and his green devils," muttered Khal Kan. "Now where are father and our footmen?"

"See—they come!" Golden Wings cried, pointing northward eagerly.

IN THE north, a glittering serpent of almost equal size seemed crawling southward to meet the advancing Bunt columns.

"Your desert eyes see well," declared Khal Kan. "Now we wait."

The two armies drew closer to each other. Horns were blaring now down in the Bunt columns, and the green bowmen were hastily forming up in double columns, a solid, blocky formation. More slowly, they advanced.

Trumpets roared in the north, where the footmen of Jotan marched steadily on. Faintly to the two on the ridge came the distant chorus.

"The Bunts fled back on the homeward track
When blood did flow!"

"There is my uncle, damn him!" exclaimed Khal Kan, pointing.

He felt the old, bitter rage as he saw the stalwart, bright-helmed figure that rode with a group of Bunts at the head of the green men's army.

"He leads them to the battle," he muttered. "He never was a coward, whatever else he is. But today I will wipe out his menace to Jotan."

"They are fighting!" Golden Wings cried, with flaring cagerness.

Clouds of arrows were whizzing between the two nearing armies, as Jotan archers and Bunt bowmen came within range.

Men began to drop in both armies—but in the Jotan army four fell for every stricken Bunt.

"Something's wrong!" Khal Kan cried. "Every man of ours who is even touched by an arrow is falling. I can't—"

"Poison!" hissed Golden Wings. "They are using poisoned arrows. It's a trick I've heard of the Nameless Men of the far north."

Khal Kan stared unbelievingly. "Even the Bunts wouldn't use such hideous means! Yet my uncle is ruthless—"

Red rage misted his brain, and his voice was an unhuman roar as he turned and shouted to his tensely waiting horsemen.

"Our men are being slain by foul magic!" he yelled. "Down upon them—we strike for Jotan!"

It was as though he and Golden Wings were riding the forefront of a human avalanche as they charged down the steep slope to the battle.

They smashed home into the flank of the Bunts. The green men gave way in surprise and momentary terror. Kahl Kan's sword whipped like a lash of light among ugly green heads and thrusting spears. As always, in a fight, he moved by pure instinct rather than by conscious design.

Yet he kept Golden Wings a little behind him. The girl was fiercely wielding her light sword against those on the ground who sought to hamstring Khal Kan's horse with spear or sword. His riders were yelling shrilly.

THE crazy confusion of the battle took on definite pattern. The Bunts had recoiled from the unexpected attack, but Egir was reforming them.

Khal Kan shouted and spurred to get at Egir. He could see his uncle's giant form, his cynical, powerful face under his helmet, and could hear his bull voice directing the reforming of the Bunt columns.

But he could not smash through the mad melee toward Egir. And now poisoned Bunt arrows were falling, dropping men from their saddles.

Brusul had reached him, was shouting to him. "Prince, your father is slain—one of those hellish arrows."

Khal Kan's heart went cold for a moment. He hardly heard Brusul's hoarse voice, shouting on.

"We can't face those poisoned shafts here in the open! Unless we fall back,

they'll cut us down from a distance like grain in harvest-time!"

Khal Kan groaned. He saw the dilemma. They could not hope to smash the Bunt lines that Egir had reformed—and in a long battle the new poisoned arrows of the green men would take heavier and heavier toll of them.

The safety of Jotan was now a crushing weight on his shoulders. He was king now, and the dire responsibility of the position in this mad moment left him no time even for sorrow for his father. A battle lost here now meant that Jotan was defenseless before Egir's horde.

With a groan, he ordered a trumpeter to sound retreat.

"Fall back toward Jotan!" he ordered. "March the footmen back on the double, Brusul—we'll cover your withdrawal with the horsemen."

Through the long, hot hours of that afternoon, the bitter fighting retreat surged back northward to Jotan. The Bunt columns followed closely, the green men howling with triumph.

Ever and again, Khal Kan and his riders charged back against the pursuing Bunts and smashed their front lines, making them recoil. Each time, empty saddles showed the toll of the poisoned shafts.

Sunset was flaring bloodily over the Dragals when they came back by that bitter way to the black towers of Jotan. Footsore, reeling with fatigue, Brusul's spearmen marched through the gate into the city.

One last charge back at the Bunts made Khal Kan with the horsemen. He rode back then with Golden Wings, who was swaying in her saddle. They two were the last of the riders to enter the city.

The great gates hastily ground shut, as sweating men labored in the dusk at the winches. Through the loopholes of the guard-towers, Khal Kan looked out and saw the Bunt hordes outside spreading to encircle the whole land side of Jotan.

"They have now four fighting-men to every one of ours," he muttered through his teeth. "We are in a trap called a city."

He was staggering, his face grimed and smeared with sweat and dust and blood. Golden Wings pressed his arm in complete faith.

"It was only the foul trick of the poisoned arrows that defeated us!" she exclaimed. "But for that, we'd have rolled them into the sea."

"We have Egir to thank for that," rasped Khal Kan. "While that man lives, doom hangs like a thundercloud over Jotan."

He stepped to the window and sent his voice rolling out into the gathering darkness."

"Egir, will you settle this man to man, sword to sword? Speak!"

Back came a sardonic voice from the camp of the Bunts.

"I am not so simple, my dear nephew! Your city's a nut whose shell we'll soon crack and pick, so rest you."

Khal Kan set guards at every rod of the wall. Jotan's streets were dark under the two moons, for no torches had been lit this night. The sound of women's voices wailing a requiem for his dead father brought his numbed mind a sick sense of loss.

No one else in Jotan spoke or broke the stillness. Awful and imminent peril crushed the city's folk. But from the darkness outside the walls came the sound of distant hammering as the Bunt hordes began making scaling-ladders for the morrow.

FROM a window of the palace, before he collapsed in drugged sleep of exhaustion, Khal Kan saw the Bunt fires hemming in the whole landward side of the city in their crescent of flame. . . .

Henry Steven's wife had been worried about him all day. He had been

acting queerly, she thought anxiously, ever since he had awakened that morning.

He had been pale and stricken and haggard since he had awakened. He had not gone to the office at all, a thing unprecedented. And he had spent most of the day pacing to and fro in the little house, his haunted eyes not seeming to see her, his whole bearing one of intense excitement.

Henry was afraid—afraid of the dread climax to which things were rushing in the other world of Thar. He knew the awful peril in which Jotan now stood. Once those hordes of Bunts got over the wall, the city was doomed.

"I've got to quit driving myself crazy about it," he told himself desperately that afternoon. "It's just a dream—Thar and Khal Kan *must* be only a dream."

But his feverish apprehension was not lessened by that thought. No matter if Thar was only a dream, it was real to him!

HE KNEW Jotan and its people, from the nightly dreams of his earliest childhood. Every street of the black city he had known and loved, as Khal Kan. Even if it were only a dream, he couldn't let the old, lovely city and its people be overwhelmed by Egir and his green barbarians.

If Thar was the dream, and the city Jotan was taken and Khal Kan was slain—there would be an end to his precious dream-life, forever. Only the monotonous existence of Henry Stevens would stretch before him.

And if Thar happened to be the *reality*, then it was doubly vital that Khal Kan's people be saved from that menace.

"Yet what can I do?" Henry groaned inwardly. "What can Khal Kan do? The Bunts will surely break into the city—"

The poisoned arrows, new to the Jotanians, gave Egir's green warriors a terrific advantage. That, and their outnumbering hordes, would enable them to scale the walls of Jotan and then the end would be at hand.

"Damn Egir for his deviltry in using those arrows!" Henry muttered. "I wish I could take a dozen machine-guns across. I'd show the cursed traitor."

It was a vain and idle wish, he knew. Nothing material could traverse the gulf between dream-world and real world, whichever was which. His own body, even—Henry Stevens' body—never crossed that gulf. All he took into Thar each night were his memories of Henry Stevens' life on Earth during the day, and that seemed only a dream.

He *could* take memory across, though. And that thought gave pause to Henry. A faint gleam of hope appeared on his horizon. As Khal Kan, he would remember everything that he did or learned now, as Henry Stevens. Suppose that he—

"By Heaven!" Henry exclaimed excitedly. "There's a chance I could do it! A trick to overmatch Egir's poisoned arrows!"

His wife watched him puzzledly as he pored excitedly over certain volumes of their encyclopedia. She saw him hastily jot down notes, and then for a long time that evening he sat, moving his lips, apparently memorizing.

Henry was vibrant with excitement and hope. He, Henry Stevens of Earth, might be able to save Khal Kan's city for him!

"If Khal Kan will only do it!" he thought prayerfully. "If he won't just ignore it as dream—"

Waiting tensely for sleep that night, Henry repeated over and over to himself the simple formula he had gleaned from the encyclopedia.

"Khal Kan *must* try it!" he told himself desperately.

Sleep came slowly to him. And as he fell asleep, he knew that in his dream he would wake to what might be the last day of Jotan's existence. . . .

Khal Kan awoke with that thought from his dream vibrating in his mind like an ominous tolling.

"The last day of Jotan!" he whispered. "By all the gods—*no!*"

Fiercely, the tall young prince rose and buckled on his sword. It was just dawn, and sea-mists shrouded all the city outside in gray fog.

Golden Wings still lay sleeping, Khal Kan heard a persistent hammering from out in the fog, as he went down to the lower level of the palace. Brusul, in full armor, came stalking up to him.

"All's quiet," reported the brawny captain. "The Bunts are still working away at their cursed scaling-ladders. When they are ready, they'll clear the walls of our men with their damned poisoned arrows, and then come over."

Khal Kan went out with him and inspected their defenses. As he supervised the placing of their fighting-men around the wall, and gave the white-faced people rough encouragement, something oppressed Khal Kan's mind. Something he should be doing for the defense of the city—

When he got back to the palace with Brusul, Golden Wings' slim, leather-clad figure came flying into his arms.

"I dreamed the Bunts were already in the city!" she cried. "And then I awoke and found you gone—"

Khal Kan, soothing her, suddenly stiffened. Her words had recalled that vague, forgotten something that had oppressed him.

"My dream!" he exclaimed. "I remember now—in the dream, on that other world, I learned how to make a weapon against the Bunts."

It had all come back to him now—the dream in which Henry Stevens had feverishly memorized a formula out of the science of that dream-world of Earth, to help him in his struggle against the Bunts.

For a moment, Khal Kan clutched at new hope. Then his eagerness faded. After all, that was only a dream. Henry Stevens and Earth and its science were only an insubstantial vision of his sleeping mind, and nothing that he learned in that could be of any value.

"I could wish you'd dreamed away the Bunts entirely," Brusul was saying dryly. "Unfortunately, they're still outside and it won't be many hours before they attack."

Khal Kan was not listening. His mind was revolving the simple formula that Henry Stevens had desperately memorized, in the dream.

"It wouldn't work," he thought. "It couldn't work, when there's no reality to all that—"

Yet he kept remembering Henry Stevens' desperate effort to help him. That timid, thin little man he was in his dream each night—that little man had prayed that Khal Kan would not ignore his help, would try the formula.

Khal Kan reached decision. "I'm going to try it—the thing I learned in the dream!" he told the others.

Brusul stared. "Are you wit-struck? Dreams won't help us now! How could a dream-weapon be of any use?"

"I'm not so sure now it was a dream," Khal Kan muttered. "Maybe *this* is the dream, after all. Oh, hell take all speculations—dream or reality, I'm going to try this thing."

He shot orders. "Bring all the charcoal you can find, all the sulphur from the street of the apothecaries, and all of the white crystals we use for drying fruits. Those crystals were called 'saltpetet' in the dream."

SCARED, wondering men brought the materials to the palace. There, Brusul and Zoor and Golden Wings watched mystifiedly as Khal Kan supervised their preparation.

He remembered clearly the formula that Henry Stevens had memorized in the dream. He had the men pound and pulverize and mix, until a big mass of granular black powder was the result.

"Now bring small metal vases—enough to hold all this—and lampwicks and clay," he ordered.

A captain came running, breathless. "The Bunts have finished their ladders and I think they're soon going to make their attack, sire!" he cried.

"And our leader lingers here, muddling in minerals!" cried Brusul gustily. "Khal Kan, forget this crazy dream and make ready for battle!"

KHAL KAN paid no attention. He was having the men stuff the small metal vases with the black powder, stopping their mouths with clay through which a fuse-like wick protruded.

"Distribute these vases to all our men along the walls," he ordered. "Tell them, that when the Bunts place their ladders, they are to light the fuses and fling the vases down among the green warriors, at my command."

"Hell destroy all dreams!" raged Brusul. "What good will such a crazy plan do? Do you think dropping vases on the Bunts will stop them?"

"I don't know," Khal Kan muttered. "In the dream, I thought it would. The dream-me called the powder 'gunpowder' and the vases 'grenades.' And in the dream they seemed a more terrible weapon even than the poisoned arrows."

Yells from the walls and the warning blare of trumpets ripped across the sunlit city. A great cry swept through Jotan's streets.

"The Bunts are coming!"

"To the wall!" Khal Kan cried.

From the parapet atop the great wall, the rising sun revealed an ominous spectacle. From all around the landward side of Jotan, the hordes of the Bunts were surging toward the city.

First came a line of green bowmen whose hissing, poisoned shafts were already rattling along the top of the wall. Jotanian warriors sank groaning as the swift poison sped into their blood. Khal Kan held his shield up, and swept Golden Wings behind him as they waited.

Behind the first line of bowmen came Bunts carrying long, rough wooden scaling-ladders. Behind these came the main masses of the stocky green men, armed with bows and short-swords, led by Egir himself.

The ladders came up against the wall, and the blood-chilling Bunt yell broke around the city as the green warriors swarmed catlike up them. Jotanians who sought to push over the ladders were smitten by arrows.

"Over the wall and open the gates!" Egir's bull voice was yelling to his green men. "Let us into Jotan!"

The main horde of the Bunts was already surging toward the gates of the city, while their attackers on the ladders sought to win the wall.

"Now—light the fuses and drop the vases!" Khal Kan yelled along the parapet, through the melee.

Torches at readiness set the wicks alight. The seemingly harmless little metal vases were tossed over into the surging mass of the Bunts.

A series of ear-splitting crashes shook the air, like thunder. White smoke drifted away to show masses of the Bunts felled by the explosions.

"Gods!" cried Brusul appalledly. "Your dream-weapon is thunder of heaven itself!"

"Magic!" yelled the Bunts, shrinking back aghast from their own dead, tumbling in panic off the ladders. "Flee, brothers!"

The fear-maddened green warriors surged back from the walls of Jotan, breaking in panic-stricken, disorganized masses.

Egir's bull voice could be heard raging, trying to rally them, but in vain.

The men of Jotan who had lighted and flung the new weapons were as horrified as their victims. Khal Kan's yell aroused them.

"Horses, and after them!" he cried. "Now is our chance to avenge yesterday!"

The gates ground open—and every horsemen left in Jotan galloped out after Khal Kan and Golden Wings in pursuit of the routed green men.

The Bunts made hardly any effort to turn and fight. They were madly intent on putting as great a distance as possible between them and Jotan.

"It's Egir I'm after!" Khal Kan cried to Brusul. "While he lives, no safety for Jotan!"

"See — there he rides!" cried Golden Wings' silvery voice.

Khal Kan yelled and put spur to his horse as he saw Egir and his Bunt captains riding full tilt toward the Dragals, in an effort to escape.

They rode right through the fleeing Bunts in pursuit of the traitor. They were overtaking him, when Egir turned and saw them coming. The Jotanian renegade uttered a yell, and he and his green captains turned.

"'Ware arrows!" shouted Brusul, behind Khal Kan.

Khal Kan saw the Bunts loosing the vicious shafts, but he saw it only vaguely, for only Egir's sardonic face was clear to him as he charged.

Sword out, he galloped toward his uncle. Something stung his arm, and he heard a scream from Golden Wings and knew an arrow had hit him.

"My dear nephew, you've two minutes to live!" panted Egir, his eyes blazing hate and triumph as they met and their swords clashed. "You're a dead man now—"

Khal Kan felt a cold, deadly numbness creeping through his arm with incredible rapidity. He summoned all his fast-flowing strength to swing his sword up.

It left his guard open and Egir stabbed viciously as their horses wheeled. Then Khal Kan's nerveless arm brought his blade down.

"This for my father, Egir!"

The sword shore the traitor's shoulder and neck half through. And a moment after Egir dropped from the saddle, Khal Kan felt his own numb body falling. He could not feel the impact with the ground.

His mind was darkening and everything was spinning around. It was as though he whirled in a black funnel, and was being sucked down into its depths, yet he could still hear voices of those bending over him.

"Khal Kan!" That was Golden Wings, he knew.

He tried to speak up to them out of the roaring darkness that was engulfing him.

"Jotan—safe now, with Egir gone. The kingship to Brusul. Golden Wings—"

He could not form more words. Khal Kan knew that he was dying. But he knew, at last, that Thar was *not* a dream, for even though his own life was passing, nothing around him was vanishing. But, his darkening brain wondered, if Thar had been real all the time—

But then, in a flash of light on the very verge of darkness, Khal Kan saw the truth that neither he nor the other had ever imagined. . . .

HENRY STEVENS lay dead upon his bed in the neat bedroom of his little suburban cottage. And in the room, his sobbing wife was trying to tell her story to the physician and the psychiatrist.

"It was all so sudden," she sobbed. "I awoke, and found that Henry was clenching his fists as though in a convulsion and was shouting—something about Jotan being safe now. And then—he was dead—"

The physician was soothing her as he

led her to another room. When he came back, his face was keen as he looked at Doctor Thorn.

"You heard her story?" he said to the psychiatrist. "I telephoned you because I understood he'd been consulting you. I can't understand this thing at all."

He pointed to Henry's motionless figure. "The man had nothing organically wrong with him, as I happen to know. Yet he died in his sleep—as though from terrible mental shock."

"You've hit it, Doctor," nodded Doctor Thorn thoughtfully. "If my guess is right, he was dreaming, and when his dream-self was killed, Henry Stevens died, also."

He went on to tell the physician of the case.

The practitioner's face became incredulous as he heard.

"The poor devil!" he ejaculated. "He had that dream and dream-life all his life long, and when his dream-self died, he died too by mental suggestion."

"I am not sure that that other life of his, that world of Thar, *was* a dream," Doctor Thorn replied soberly.

"Oh, come, Doctor," protested the other. "If Henry Stevens and Earth were real, and we know they were, Thar and Khal Kan must have been only his dream."

"I wonder," replied the psychiatrist. "Did you ever hear of mental rapport? Cases where two people's minds are so tuned that one experiences the other's feelings and thoughts, when his own mind is relaxed and quiescent? There have been a good many such provable cases.

"Suppose," Thorn went on, "that Henry Stevens was a unique case of that. Suppose that his mind happened to be in rapport, from the time of his birth, with the mind of another man—another man, who was not of Earth but of some world far across the universe from ours? Suppose that each man's subconscious was able to experience the other man's thoughts and feelings, when his own consciousness was relaxed and sleeping? So that each man, all his life, seemed each night to *dream* the other man's life?"

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the practitioner. "If that were true, *both* Henry Stevens and Khal Kan were real, on far-separated worlds?"

Doctor Thorn nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, and the two men would be so much in rapport that the death of one would kill the other. It's only a theory, and we can never know if it's true. Probably he knows, now—"

Henry Stevens, lying there, seemed to be smiling at their speculations. But it was not his own smile that lay upon his face. It was the reckless, gay, triumphant smile of Khal Kan.

From THE WITCH'S TALE—that highly popular radio broadcast which thrilled you so often over the air—comes a story specially adapted for the magazine by that famous program's author and director, Alonzo Deen Cole.

The Spirits of the Lake

By ALONZO DEEN COLE

Was it at the bidding of the "Old Ones" that slime—loathsome, hideously green—rose from the lake's dreadful depths to exact monstrous vengeance . . . ?

ROGER BENTON slammed the bungalow door behind him and stamped down the path to the shore. Another month in this wilderness and Bernice would be going about dressed in a blanket and beads, he angrily told himself—for she acted and thought more like a damned Indian every day. He'd been a fool to let her buy this island a stone's throw from the reservation on the advice of these dumb doctors. Her lungs hadn't shown any improvement here; her condition was worse, if anything—and as for the effects of this "Back to Nature" stuff on *him*—! He cursed aloud, bitterly.

From across the placid lake a monotonous Indian chant beat at his eardrums, and weak tears of self pity welled into his eyes.

Back in Chicago, his marriage to the semi-invalid Bernice had seemed a good bargain, for she was wealthy, very generous, and had never attempted to pry too deeply into his outside affairs. But here, where he saw no one but her and a handful of stinking red-skins; where he heard nothing but that savage caterwauling and her incessant coughing—! He flung himself into the canoe and paddled furiously toward the mainland—and Hilda Johannson.

What a difference that Swedish farmer's daughter could make in his exile, if she would only cast aside her backwoods scruples! He railed inwardly at *her* now, for her frigid aloofness had long since fired him with a consuming infatuation. Nothing was right on this damn Michigan peninsula!

Floating across the slimy lake in ceaseless, maddening rhythm, the savage chant intruded itself upon his mind again and drove out thoughts of Hilda. He laid aside the paddle for a moment to stop his ears, so unbearable had the sound become. It had begun early this evening when the pale new moon cast its first reflection on the waters, and it would continue every night until this moon had waned. It had been Bernice's infantile delight in its crazy significance that precipitated his furious departure from the house. She had said:

"It's a ceremony the tribe holds every year at this time to appease the Spirits of the Lake—the *Neebanawbaigs*, they call them. This is a holy lake to the Indians, you know; and they say if anyone affronts it, or harms its friends, the *Neebanawbaigs* take terrible vengeance!" Here she had laughed self-consciously — as well she might!—before she went on:

"Two Horses—that's our old housekeeper's cousin, you know—spoke so convincingly of its terrors that I made it a peace offering this afternoon. I cast a bouquet of garden flowers on the waters, and said a prayer Two Horses taught me. Now, no one may harm me, for fear the Spirits of the Lake will punish them."

That last bit of addle-brained nonsense had marked the limit of Roger's endurance. What civilized man wouldn't have blown up and flown out of the house in disgust after that? And, because Bernice's silliness had driven him away so early in the evening, he would arrive at his rendezvous with Hilda half an hour too soon. Roger Benton felt terribly abused.

Hilda, following the custom of her sex, did not appear until much later than the waiting man expected.

When she finally came in sight, she presented a striking contrast to the thin, dark, ailing woman he had left in anger. Tall, strong, blonde as her Viking forebears, she strode with lithe grace along the forest path.

Eyes that were too cold, and a thin lipped mouth too firmly set, marred the beauty of her face. But Roger Benton had never noted these imperfections. His long wait had sharpened his desire. Forgetting past rebuffs, he rushed to meet her and clasped her in his arms.

She coolly disengaged herself and sat down upon a fallen tree.

Irritably, he threw himself beside her. "Hilda, why do you hold me off like this?" he pouted. "You know I'm mad—insane about you."

Her thin lips curled in a faint smile. "You have no right to be mad about me —you're a married man."

"We're not children! You know how little I care about my wife! Besides, it's only a question of time before—" He paused.

"Before she will die, you mean," she finished simply.

He turned his head away. "Yes. She thinks she's getting better; but the doctors don't tell her what they tell me." His arms clasped her again, "And the moment I'm free, I'll marry you—I swear it! But I

can't wait for you till then—I've got to have you!"

She thrust him away, roughly this time. "You will have me only as your wife. I have told you that before."

His hands fell helplessly to his sides. Petulantly, resentfully, he complained, "If you really mean that, why don't you stop making a fool of me? Why do you meet me here by the lake each night, playing with me as a cat does with a mouse?"

She looked at him silently for a moment; then quietly, "Because I hope you will not always be a mouse. If you are as mad about me as you say, you will not let a woman you hate stand between us much longer.'

"What can I do? Divorce is out of the question."

"Of course—then her money would be taken from you."

He was annoyed. "I'm not thinking only of *money!*"

She leaned close to him, "*I'm* not thinking only of divorce."

He stared at her for a long moment, and her cold, unwavering eyes returned his gaze. His eyes fell and she began to talk rapidly in her low, compelling voice.

THE pathetic little cough rasped out again. At the sound, the man in the stern dipped his paddle more deeply into the faint shimmer of the scum-covered water.

After a struggling, breathless moment, the coughing spell abated and its victim spoke:

"It's wonderful to be on the lake with you again, Roger—it's been so long since we've been in the canoe together." She laughed happily. "I feel as though we were beginning a second honeymoon."

Roger Benton glanced briefly at his frail wife, grunted, and returned his attention to the paddle. In the silence that followed the throbbing hum of the Indian chant slid steadily over the water — a brooding monotone of endless cadence.

Finally Bernice spoke again.

"How solemn the chant sounds tonight: Like the hymn it really is—a prayer for the dying."

"For the—dying?" His voice held a sharp, uncertain quality.

"Yes. This is Indian Summer, you know —the Moon of Falling Leaves, of dying things. That song is a tribute to fading nature. Rather beautiful, don't you think?"

The paddle trailed unheeded, as he repeated abstractedly: "The Moon of Falling Leaves—of dying things."

She leaned forward a little, her dark eyes searching his face anxiously. "Roger —you act so strangely tonight. Aren't you well, dear?"

He straightened, recovered himself. "I'm quite all right." He resumed his jerky, erratic stroke, as she reached to place a small hand tenderly on his knee.

"I know how unhappy you are here. But I'll be well again soon, and we'll go back to the city." She laughed self-consciously, "I would like to return here for just one day each year, though—to renew my offering to the Spirits of the Lake. I've taken their protection very seriously, you see."

The muscles of his jaw working spasmodically under the tanned skin, and he opened his mouth as though to speak.

Quickly, placatingly, she forestalled him.

"Please don't be annoyed, dear, it's such a pretty legend."

He turned his head abruptly away; as though in anger or to avoid her eyes. His strokes grew faster, clumsier; stabbing angry slashes that sent the frail craft forward in plunging leaps. The woman, a little fearfully, looked behind her to see where this mad race was heading. Then she spoke again, with patently assumed unconcern:

"Roger, sharp rocks are just ahead—

those the Indians call the "Spirits Talons'." She continued, as though to herself, "They say the Road to the Villages of the Happy Dead leads over such rocks as those—rocks with a knife-like edge, upon which only the Good can keep their footing; the Bad fall off into an abyss of eternal torment."

His hysterical snarl brought her rudely to a stop.

"Stop talking that filthy savage rot! It can't frighten me!"

Her eyes grew wide in amazement. His voice rose in a crazy yell:

"I'm not afraid of 'spirits'! They can't hurt me—and men will say it was an accident! An *accident!*"

Madly he continued, repeating again and again, "An *accident!*"

Her hands mounted in futile gesture to her throat and she began to cough; gasping, terror laden words tumbling out between the spasms.

"You're making for the rocks on purpose—you know I can't swim—you mean to drown me—Roger—don't—Turn back—turn back—"

His voice and stroke beat on. "Accident—accident—"

The blood drained from her face, she clawed frantically at the gunwales—tried terribly to scream.

With a rending crash, the canoe splintered to matchwood on the razor-edged rocks.

Roger Benton swam to shore and fell, sobbing, to the ground. From far away, the savage chant in honor of the Moon of Falling Leaves—of dying things—still rose and fell. But he didn't hear it now. The sound of a canoe ripping upon sharp rocks was repeating over and over inside his mind. He was hearing again the horrible, choking struggles of a drowning woman. He was hearing again the words she'd cried before the waters closed about her—words that would reverberate within his brain forever:

"Oh, God—great gitche Manitou—Spirits of the Lake—" she'd prayed, "—punish—punish—punish—"

UP THE rough path from the water's edge toiled the grim little cortege Roger Benton had been dreading for a week. He watched the two approaching Indians and their grisly burden from his bedroom window, then steeled his nerves for the inevitable knock upon his door. When it came, he almost screeched his answer.

The voice of Nahma, the old squaw who Bernice had engaged as housekeeper, replied, "Men of my tribe—they find Missis."

He quavered. "I'll be down."

How he managed to descend the stairs to the living room, he didn't know, nor how he forced his rebellious eyes to focus themselves on the horror before him. But he did manage, somehow.

His gaze took in the sodden divan, on which they'd placed her, huge spots of lake water darkening the upholstery; the dripping figure with gaping mouth and wide eyes staring out of a pulpy mask the weeds and moss that trailed from the streaming hair to the rug below.

And, in a corner of his chaotic mind a thought intruded that some element was missing from the scene. He searched for it vaguely.

It was the brisk little county coroner who, later that day, found it for him.

Wagging his head sympathetically as he prepared to leave after completion of his professional duties, "Folks round here were mighty shocked when they heard 'bout your accident on th' lake an' Mrs. Benton's drownin'. 'Course, we haven't known your wife long; but everyone who met her thought she was a mighty fine lady—th' Injuns especially." He paused, and looked thoughtfully at the floor. "Funny thing 'bout the slime, ain't it?"

Something clicked in Roger Benton's brain. "Slime?"

The little man nodded. "You know, the slime that covers the whole lake this time o' year. There wasn't none on her. The body should've been covered with it, by rights, after bein' over a week in th' water. Don't seem natteral like, does it?" He grinned rather sheepishly. " 'Course, I don't hold with what them Injuns says 'bout it."

With an effort the other murmured, "What do they say about it?"

"Some heathen stuff 'bout th' d'ceased bein' a friend of the lake sperits, an' them savin' her from th' deefilement o' th' slime." He chuckled. "What stuff them dumb savages do think up!"

Roger Benton didn't answer. He sat very still, listening to the chant that drummed against his ears through the open window.

II

AS HE paddled evenly through the water the copper-skinned boatman rested a stolid gaze upon the back of the cringing figure who sat in the center of his canoe.

A very different look burned from the eyes of the expensively dressed blonde woman who reclined beside the cringing figure—a look of disgust and contempt which soon took form in rancid words: "If you could only see yourself!" she sneered. "You're white as a sheet and trembling like a frightened dog."

Benton turned bloodshot, pleading eyes upon her. "Won't you change your mind, Hilda? Please tell him to take us back."

"When we're nearly there?" Her jaw set grimly. "Not much I won't! It's taken me two years to get you this far—and now you're going the rest of the way; you won't cheat me any longer out of the pleasure of swelling it over my old neighbors in that swanky island bungalow."

He stretched a quivering hand toward her, "Hilda, I'll buy you a nicer place. I'll buy you anything you like, if you won't make me go back there."

She knocked his hand aside roughly. "You could buy me the most expensive mansion on Fifth Avenue and it wouldn't give me the kick of living on that island across from Paw's farm where I used to be so poor."

A flash of forgotten spirit was in his voice as he leaned toward her out of earshot of the oarsman: "Haven't you done enough to me already? Have you forgotten the reason you're not poor now is that you made me commit a murder you had planned?"

"Shut up, you fool!" she hissed through clenched teeth, "And get this through your head, once and for all: *I* planned nothing—*I* knew nothing—*I* did nothing! And you or nobody else can prove otherwise!"

The canoe slid to a stop upon the island shore. "We're here. Get up and help me out," she commanded.

For a long moment he remained motionless, glaring at her with a burning hatred. Under her own steady stare, his gaze wavered, dropped. When he raised it again it was a vacant, hopeless thing.

As his wife picked a fastidious way through the shells and weed that covered the shore, old Nahma waddled down the h'lly path toward them. Hilda peered past her at the coveted bungalow. Satisfied with what she saw she turned patronizingly to the squaw.

"Well old woman looks from here like you've taken pretty good care of things." Nahma returned an impassive nod then gazed silently into her eyes. Hilda felt vaguely uncomfortable and abruptly ordered:

"I want you to go back to the mainland

with Two Horses." She indicated the Indian who had brought them. "You can help him bring back our baggage." With a grunt Nahma swung herself into the canoe and followed the two with her beady eyes as they mounted the path to the house.

Roger Benton reached the porch steps, stumbled as he mounted them, and was cursed for his clumsiness. As Hilda opened the door, a sudden swell of sound smote his ears. He raised his head quickly, like a startled animal.

The tribesmen had begun their yearly chant across the lake.

Hilda chuckled dryly, "You've heard that before. This is the singing season for these fools."

"Yes—" he muttered, "it's the 'Moon of Falling Leaves—of dying things'." Then he fell groveling at her feet. "I can't go in that house," he sobbed, "I've got to leave this island! I'm afraid here—I'm *afraid!*"

She swung the door open, pushed him inside and down on the nearest chair. Then she cursed, sneered, threatened and cajoled until his hysteria had spent itself. When his sobs of unreasoning terror ceased, she thrust a flask of whiskey in his hand and told him, "I'm going to have a look through the house and make sure that squaw's taken care of things. You stay quiet here till I come back and,"—with a sneer—"don't let that conscience of yours get going again."

The chant from across the lake beat monotonously against his ears. After awhile he became aware of another sound—a dry little rasping that seemed somehow familiar, native to the place. He found a kind of peace in the strangely wonted sound—until his mind snapped open and he realized what it was.

It was an invalid's rasping cough.

His scream brought Hilda down the stairs almost instantly.

Voice breaking to treble pitch in his terror, he indicated the closed door that led to the living room, "I heard Bernice coughing—in *there!*"

She slammed him back into the chair. "You've got her on your brain, that's all."

"No—no," he whispered. "I heard her, I tell you!" He stiffened, sat upright.

Behind that closed door something had coughed again. Hilda wheeled, a light of bewilderment in her face. "Say, I heard something that time!" She strode purposefully to the door.

He found her laughing. "Absolutely empty—not a soul here but ourselves." Then both heard the cough again.

He stood as if frozen she, puzzled. "Funny—we *both* hear it, yet this room is empty. Oh—!" impatiently, she threw off the unaccustomed fear that strove to grip her—"You've got me imagining things now, that's the whole answer."

Neither spoke for a full minute. Both stood tense. Listening. Waiting. Finally, Hilda shivered slightly. "Must be going to rain," she muttered, "feel how damp it's grown suddenly?"

"Yes," he quavered, "very damp—suddenly." She followed his gaze, riveted to a spot on the floor.

"Where did *that* come from? A minute ago this room was as neat as a pin. What is it?"

He mumbled thickly, his hands shaking: "It's slime—green slime, from the bottom of the lake."

"That squaw didn't clean—"

He interrupted her, "It wasn't there a minute ago. You said that yourself."

"I must have overlooked it!" Her voice was wavering, uncertain now. "There's another—and *another,* right on the divan!"

"Yes! And there—and there—"

All over the room began to appear patch after patch of the filthy slime forming silently under their horrified eyes. As they

stared, the patch on the divan spread—grew till it almost covered the cushions.

He gibbered, pointing a shaking finger at it. "That's where they laid her, after—"

She turned on him savagely. "If you don't stop that, I'll brain you! There's a natural explanation for this. Ugh!" She broke off, revulsed, as she felt the cold spat of the green stuff on her hand.

"The room is full of it," he shrieked. "It's from the lake! From the Spirits of the Lake she prayed to punish me! I knew they would if I came back here!"

"They have nothing against *me*—I had nothing to do with—!" She was interrupted by his scream of terror. Her eyes followed his, and stark panic fell upon her.

On the sodden divan lay a dripping figure with wisps of weed and moss hanging from its matted hair.

An instant later they were racing madly down the wet, crumbling path to the beach and a canoe. From the sky above them, from trees, bushes, even rocks it seemed, sprang the clammy, fetid slime, hurling itself into their faces, raising their gorge with its noxious odor, chilling their hearts with each wet impact.

Suddenly, the man stopped short. The woman ran on, screamed back at him to follow.

"No!" he sobbed. "Not out on that lake. Can't you see that's what it wants—to get us on the water!"

Apparently she did not hear him for she continued to call on him to follow. She reached the canoe, clambered in, and beckoned to him wildly. All at once her voice soared frantically higher. She pointed.

"Look behind you!"

He pivoted, saw the grisly specter of the drowned Bernice, its dripping arms outstretched. He floundered down the path, fell into the canoe, and grasped the paddle Hilda pressed into his hands. With the strength of despair he propelled the frail shell into the lake. After a dozen strokes, he turned to glimpse the misty figure, standing at the marge; still with arms outstretched.

A moment later the paddle broke.

He sat staring at the pieces. Then "Worms" he mumbled. "It was eaten through by worms—worms from the lake."

"We're drifting—drifting toward the rocks!" The woman strove to waken him, to stir him to action. "DO something. We'll be killed!"

He shook his head. The canoe wasn't drifting—some force, powerful, utterly irresistible, was drawing them along!

The woman screeched, "The rocks!—we're going to strike!"

He nodded slowly. A terrible quiet descended upon him; the quiet of the long-condemned. Slowly he said, as though repeating a lesson from memory, "The Indians call these rocks the *Spirit's Talons*—the road to death leads over rocks like those—only the Good can keep their footing—the Bad fall off into an abyss of eternal torment."

"They won't harm ME!" Hilda shouted. "I'm going to swim—swim to safety."

He raised a deterring hand, "It's no use to try. The Spirits of the Lake will punish—as she said they would."

She shook him off, plunged into the foaming water. He quietly watched her useless struggles as the canoe bore ever faster toward the rocks.

Nahma, the old Indian woman, found their bodies days later where the lake had cast them out. The green slime which had long since disappeared from the surface of the waters, its season past, sheathed Hilda and Roger Benton in its viscous embrace. She looked for a time out of her expressionless dark face at the grisly sight, then waddled heavily away.

On the other side of the island that night, she and Two Horses each flung a handful of late garden flowers on the quiet bosom of the lake.

The Werewolf Howls

BY CLIFFORD BALL

The men who were waiting for that wolf had silver bullets in their muskets.

TWILIGHT had come upon the slopes of the vineyards, and a gentle, caressing breeze drifted through the open casement to stir into further disorder the papers upon the desk where Monsieur Etienne Delacroix was diligently applying himself. He raised his leonine head, the hair of which had in his later years turned to gray, and stared vacantly from beneath bushy brows at the formation of a wind-driven cloud as if he thought that the passive elements of the heavens could, if they so desired, aid him in some momentous decision.

There was a light but firm tap on the door which led to the hall of the château. Monsieur Delacroix blinked as his thoughts were dispersed and, in some haste, gathered various documents together and thrust them into the maw of a large envelope before bidding the knocker to enter.

Pierre, his eldest son, came quietly into the room. The father felt a touch of the pride he could never quite subdue when Pierre approached, for he had a great faith in his son's probity, as well as an admiration for the straight carriage and clear eye he, at his own age, could no longer achieve. Of late he had been resting a great many matters pertaining to the management of the Château Doré and the business of its vineyards, which supported the estate, on the broad shoulders poised before him.

But Etienne Delacroix had been born in a strict household and his habits fashioned in a stern school, and was the lineal descendant of ancestors who had planted their peasant's feet, reverently but independently, deep into the soil of France; so visible emotions were to him a betrayal of weakness. There was no trace of the deep regard he felt for his son evident when he addressed the younger man.

"Where are your brothers? Did I not ask you to return with them?"

"They are here, Father. I entered first, to be certain that you were ready to receive us."

"Bid them enter."

Jacques and François came in to stand with their elder brother and were careful to remain a few inches in his rear; he was the acknowledged spokesman. Their greetings were spoken simultaneously; Jacques' voice breaking off on a high note which caused him obvious embarrassment, for he was adolescent. Together, thought Monsieur Delacroix, they represented three important steps in his life, three payments on account to posterity. He was glad his issue had all been males; since the early death of his wife he had neither cared for any woman nor taken interest in anything feminine.

"I have here, my son, some papers of importance," he announced, addressing Pierre. "As you observe, I am placing them here where you may easily obtain them in the event of my absence." Suiting the action to the word, he removed the bulky envelope to a drawer in the desk and turned its key, allowing the tiny piece of metal to remain in its lock. "I am grow-

"He flung back his head — whimpering."

ing older"—his fierce, challenging eyes swept the trio as if he dared a possible contradiction—"and it is best that you are aware of these accounts, which are relative to the business of the château."

"Non, non!" chorused all three. "You are as young as ever, papa!"

"Sacre blue! Do you name me a liar, my children? Attend, Pierre!"

"Yes, papa."

"I have work for you this night."

The elder son's forehead wrinkled. "But the work, it is over. Our tasks are completed. The workers have been checked, the last cart is in the shed——"

"This is a special task, one which requires the utmost diligence of you all. It is of the wolf."

"The werewolf!" exclaimed Jacques, crossing himself.

THE other brothers remained silent, but mingled expressions of wonder and dislike passed across their features. Ever since the coming of the wolf the topic of its depredations had been an unwelcome one in the household of the Château Doré.

"*Mon Dieu,* Jacques!" exploded the head of the house. "Have you, too, been listening to the old wives' tales? Must you be such an imbecile, and I your father? Rubbish! There can be no werewolves; has not the most excellent Father Cromecq flouted such stories ten thousand times? It is a common wolf; a large one, true, but nevertheless a common mongrel, a beast from the distant mountain. Of its ferocity we are unfortunately well aware; so it must be dispatched with the utmost alacrity."

"But, the workers say, papa, that there have been no wolves in the fields for more than a hundred——"

"*Peste!* The ever verbose workers! The animal is patently a vagrant, a stray beast driven from the mountains by the lash of its hunger. And I, Etienne Delacroix, have pronounced that it must die!"

The father passed a heavy hand across his forehead, for he was weary from his unaccustomed labor over the accounts. His hands trembled slightly, the result of an old nervous disorder. The fingers were thick, and blunt from the hardy toil of earlier years; the blue veins were still corded from the strength which he had once possessed.

"It is well," said Pierre in his own level tones. "Since the wolf came upon and destroyed poor little Marguerite D'Estourie, tearing her throat to shreds, and the gendarmes who almost cornered it were unable to slap it because they could not shoot straight, and it persists in——"

"It slashed the shoulder of old Gavroche who is so feeble he cannot walk without two canes!" interrupted François, excitedly.

"——ravaging our ewes," concluded the single-minded Pierre, who was not to be side-tracked once he had chosen his way, whether in speech or action. "The damage to our flocks has been great, papa. It is just that we should take action, since the police have failed. I have thought this wolf strange, too, although I place no faith in demons. If it but seeks food, why must it slay so wantonly and feed so little? It is indeed like a great, gray demon in appearance. Twice have I viewed it, leaping across the meadows in the moonlight, its long, gray legs hurling it an unbelievable distance at every bound. And Marie Polydore, of the kitchens, found its tracks only yesterday at the very gates of the château!"

"I have been told," revealed Jacques, flinging his hands about in adolescent earnestness, "that the wolf is the beast-soul of one who has been stricken by the moon-demons. By day he is as other men, but by night, though he has the qualities of a saint he cannot help himself. Perhaps he is one with whom we walk and talk, little guessing his dreadful affliction."

"Silence!" roared Monsieur Delacroix. One of his clenched fists struck the desk a powerful blow and the sons were immediately quieted. "Must I listen to the ranting and raving and driveling of fools and imbeciles? Am I not still the master of the Château Doré? I will tend to the accursed matter as I have always, will I not? I have always seen to the welfare of the dwellers in the shadow of the Château Doré! And with the help of the good God I shall continue to do so, until the last drop of my blood has dried away from my bones. You comprehend?"

In a quieter tone, after the enforced silence, he continued: "I have given orders to both the foreman and Monsieur the mayor that this night, the night of the full moon by which we may detect the marauder, all the people of the vineyards and of the town beyond must remain behind locked windows and barred doors. If they have obeyed my orders—and may the

good God look after those who have not—they are even now secure in the safety of their respective homes. Let me discover but one demented idiot peeking from behind his shutter and I promise you he shall have cause to remember his disobedience!"

PIERRE nodded without speaking, knowing he was being instructed to punish a possible, but improbable, offender.

"Now, we are four intelligent men, I trust," said Monsieur Delacroix, pretending not to notice the glow of pleasure which suffused Jacques' features at being included in their number. "We are the Delacroix's, which is sufficient. And as leaders we must, from time to time, grant certain concessions to the inferior mentalities of the unfortunate who dwell in ignorance; so I have this day promised the good foremen, who petitioned me regarding the activities of this wolf, to perform certain things. They firmly believe the gray wolf is a demon, an inhuman atrocity visited upon us by the Evil One. And also, according to their ancient but childish witch-lore, that it may only be destroyed by a silver weapon."

Monsieur Delacroix reached beneath his chair and drew forth a small, but apparently heavy, sack. Upending it on the surface of the desk, he scattered in every direction a double dozen glittering cylindrical objects.

"Bullets!" exclaimed Jacques.

"*Silver* bullets!" amended Pierre.

"Yes, my son. Bullets of silver which I molded myself in the cellars, and which I have shown to the men, with the promise that they will be put to use."

"Expensive weapons," commented the thrifty François.

"It is the poor peasant's belief. If we slew this wolf with mere lead or iron they would still be frightened of their own shadows and consequently worthless at their work, as they have been for the past month. Here are the guns. Tonight you will go forth, my sons, and slay this fabulous werewolf, and cast its carcass upon the cart-load of dry wood I have had piled by the vineyard road, and burn it until there is nothing left but the ash, for all to see and know."

"Yes, papa," assented Pierre and François as one, but the boy Jacques cried: "What? So fine a skin? I would like it for the wall of my room! These who have seen the wolf say its pelt is like silver shaded into gray——"

"Jacques!" Etienne Delacroix's anger flooded his face with a great surge of red and bulging veins, and Pierre and François were stricken with awe at the sight of their father's wrath.

"If you do not burn this beast as I say, immediately after slaying it, I will forget you are my son, and almost a man! I will——"

His own temper choked him into incoherency.

"I crave your pardon, father," begged Jacques, humbled and alarmed. "I forgot myself."

"We will obey, papa, as always," said François, quickly, and Pierre gravely nodded.

"The moon will soon be up," said Monsieur Delacroix, after a short silence. The room had grown dark while they talked; receiving a wordless signal from his father, Pierre struck a match and lit the blackened lamp on the desk. With the startling transition, as light leaped forth to dispel the murky shadows of the room, Pierre came near to exclaiming aloud at sight of the haggard lines in his father's face. For the first time in his life he realized that what his parent had said earlier in the evening about aging was not spoken jocularly, not the repeated jest Monsieur Delacroix had always allowed himself, but the truth. His father was old.

"You had better go," said Etienne Dela-

croix, as his keen eyes caught the fleeting expression on his son's face. His fingers drummed a muffled tattoo upon the fine edge of his desk, the only sign of his nervous condition that he could not entirely control. "Monsieur the Mayor's opinion is that the wolf is stronger when the moon is full. But it is mine that tonight it will be easier to discover."

THE three turned to the door, but as they reached the threshold Monsieur Delacroix beckoned to the eldest. "An instant, Pierre. I speak to you alone."

The young man closed the door on his brothers' backs and returned to the desk, his steady eyes directed at his father.

Monsieur Delacroix, for the moment, seemed to have forgotten what he intended to say. His head was bowed on his chest and the long locks of his ashen hair had fallen forward over his brow. Suddenly he sat erect, as if it took an immense effort of his will to perform the simple action, and again Pierre was startled to perceive the emotions which twisted his father's features.

It was the first time he had ever seen tenderness there, or beheld love in the eyes he had sometimes, in secret, thought a little cruel.

"Have you a pocket crucifix, my son?"

"In my room."

"Take it with you tonight. And—you will stay close to Jacques, will you not?" His voice was hoarse with unaccustomed anxiety. "He is young, confident, and—careless. I would not wish to endanger your good mother's last child."

Pierre was amazed. It had been fifteen years since he had last heard his father mention his mother.

"You have been a good son, Pierre. Obey me now. Do not let the three of you separate, for I hear this beast is a savage one and unafraid even of armed men. Take care of yourself, and see to your brothers."

"Will you remain in the château for safety, papa? You are not armed."

"I am armed by my faith in the good God and the walls of Château Doré. When you have lit the fire under the wolf's body —I will be there."

He lowered the leonine head once more, and Pierre, not without another curious look, departed.

For a long while Monsieur Delacroix sat immobile, his elbows resting on the padded arms of the chair, the palms of his hands pressing into his cheeks. Then he abruptly arose and, approaching the open casement, drew the curtains wide. Outside, the long, rolling slopes fell away toward a dim horizon already blanketed by the dragons of night, whose tiny, flickering eyes were winking into view one by one in the dark void above. Hurrying cloudlets scurried in little groups across the sky.

Lamps were being lit in the jumble of cottages that were the abodes of Monsieur Delacroix's workmen, but at the moment the sky was illuminated better than the earth; for the gathering darkness seemed to cling like an animate thing to the fields and meadows, and stretch ebony claws across the ribbon of the roadway.

It was time for the moon to rise.

Monsieur Delacroix turned away from the casement and with swift, certain steps went to the door, opening it. The hall was still, but from the direction of the dining room there came a clatter of dishes as the servants cleared the table. Quickly, with an unusual alacrity for a man of his years, he silently traversed the floor of the huge hall and passed through its outer portals. A narrow gravel lane led him along the side of the château until he reached the building's extreme corner, where he abandoned it to strike off across the closely clipped sward in the direction of a small clump of beech trees.

The night was warm and peaceful, with no threat of rain. A teasing zephyr tugged

at the thick locks on his uncovered head; from somewhere near his feet came the chirp of a cricket.

In the grove it was darker until he came to its center, wending through and past the entangled thickets like one who had traveled the same path many times, and found the small glade that opened beneath the stars. Here there was more light again but no breeze at all. In the center of the glade was an oblong, grassy mound, and at one end of it a white stone, and on the stone the name of his wife.

MONSIEUR DELACROIX stood for an instant beside the grave with lowered head, and then he sank to his knees and began to pray.

In the east the sky began to brighten as though some torch-bearing giant drew near, walking with great strides beyond the edge of the earth. The stars struggled feebly against the superior illumination, but their strength diminished as a narrow band of encroaching yellow fire appeared on the rim of the world.

With its arrival the low monotone of prayer was checked, to continue afterward with what seemed to be some difficulty. Monsieur Delacroix's throat was choked, either with grief for the unchangeable past or an indefinable apprehension for the inevitable future. His breath came in struggling gasps and tiny beads of perspiration formed on his face and hands. His prayers became mumbled, jerky utterances, holding no recognizable phrases of speech. Whispers, and they ceased altogether.

A small dark cloud danced across a far-off mountain-top, slid furtively over the border of the land, and for a minute erased the yellow gleam from the horizon. Then, as if in terror, shaken by its own temerity, it fled frantically into oblivion, and the great golden platter of the full moon issued from behind the darkness it had left to deluge the landscape with a ceaseless shower of illusive atoms; tiny motes that danced the pathways of space.

Monsieur Delacroix gave a low cry like a child in pain. His agonized eyes were fixed on the backs of his two hands as he held them pressed against the dew-dampened sward. His fingers had begun to stiffen and curl at their tips; he could see the long, coarse hairs sprouting from the pores of his flesh—as he had many times within the past month since the night he had fallen asleep by the grave of his wife and slept throughout the night under the baleful beams of the moon.

He flung back his head, whimpering because of the terrible pressure he could feel upon his skull, and its shape appeared to alter so that it seemed curiously elongated. His eyes were bloodshot, and as they sank into their sockets his lips began to twitch over the fangs in his mouth.

The three brothers, crouching nervously in the shadows of the vineyards, started violently.

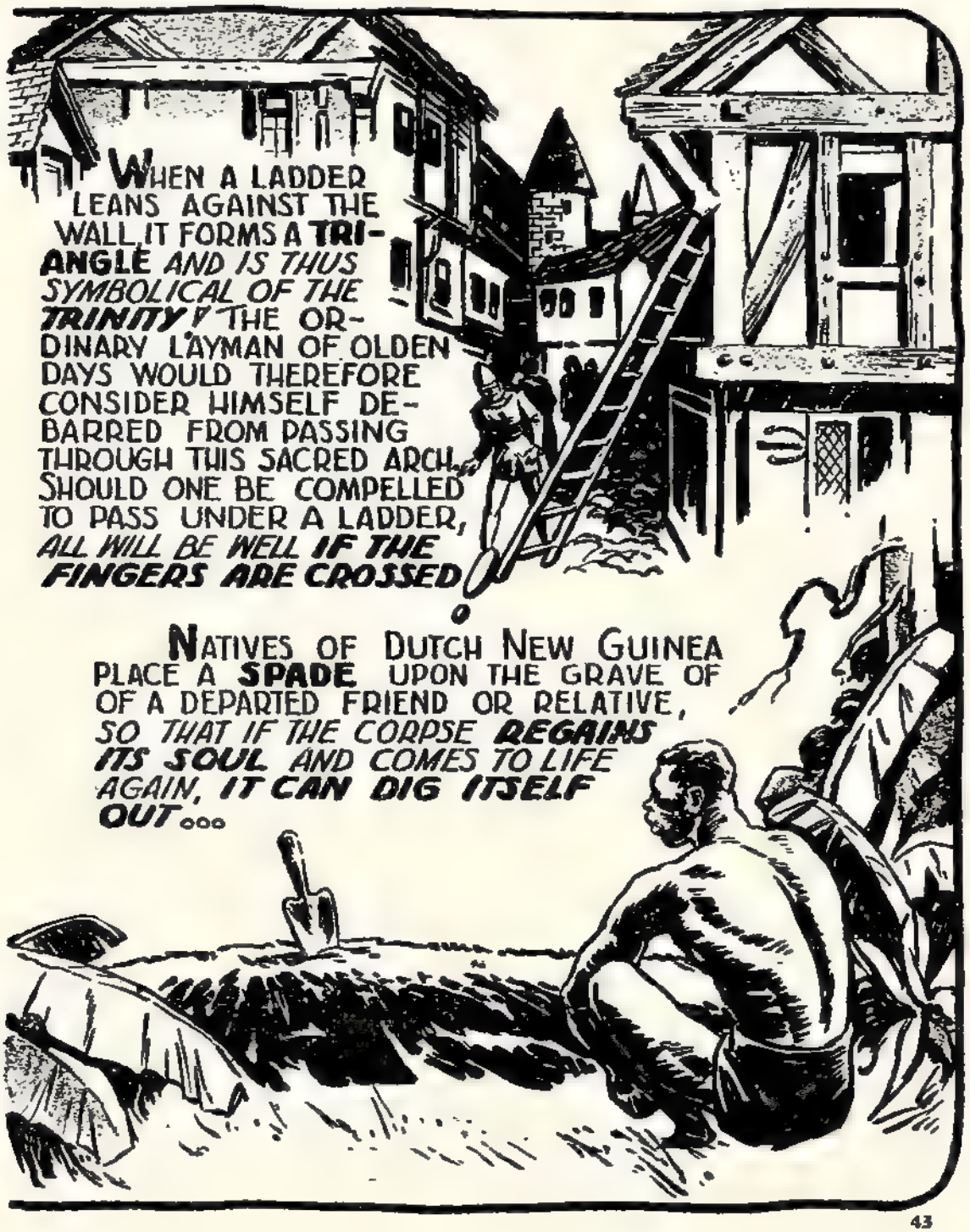
Jacques, the younger, almost lost his grasp on the gun with the silver bullets which his father had given him.

From somewhere nearby there had arisen a great volume of sound, swirling and twisting and climbing to shatter itself into a hundred echoes against the vault of the heavens, rushing and dipping and sinking into the cores of all living hearts and the very souls of men—the hunting-cry of the werewolf.

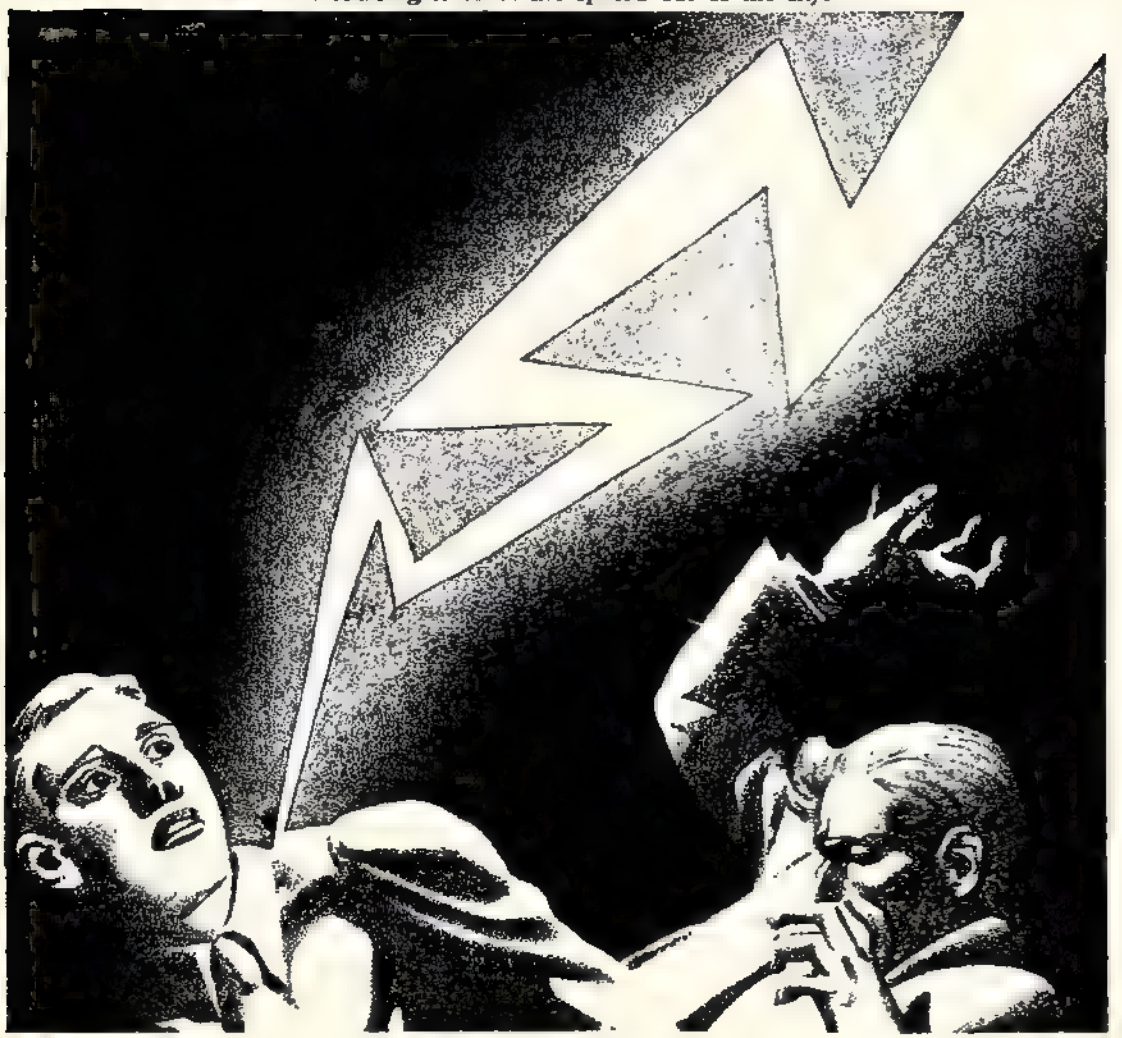
SUPERSTITIONS

THE SUPERSTITION ATTACHED TO LIGHTING ***THREE CIGARETTES*** WITH ***ONE MATCH*** *IS SUPPOSED TO DATE FROM THE TIME OF THE* ***CRIMEAN WAR..*** IN OLDEN DAYS, ALL RUSSIANS RECOGNIZED THE STRICT RULE THAT DURING THE SERVICES IN THE RUSSIAN CHURCHES, *ONLY THE HIGH PRIEST WAS ALLOWED TO LIGHT THE THREE CANDLES AT THE ALTER WITH* ***ONE TAPER!*** THE INFLUENCE OF THE PRIESTS PENETRATED TO ALL CLASSES, *AND PEOPLE WERE TAUGHT TO LOOK UPON ANYTHING CONNECTED WITH THE PRIESTHOOD AS FORBIDDEN FRUIT OR FORBIDDEN GROUND TO THEM.* DURING THE WAR, RUSSIAN PRISONERS PASSED ON THIS BELIEF TO THEIR ENGLISH CAPTORS!

AND TABOOS by Hill



A blinding river of fire spilled out of the sky!



The Mystery of Uncle Alfred

By MINDRET LORD

He was devoted to those pigs—absolutely devoted; perhaps that had something to do with his sudden, fantastic disappearance. . . .

WHEN the estate of my uncle, Alfred Fry, is finally settled, I shall give the farm to George Harris. I would not spend another night in the house for all creation. But Harris is a strange, elemental sort of man; he hated Uncle Alfred while he worked for him, and now that my uncle is gone, he hates him, still. I think it actually amuses him—and as a matter of fact, I am almost

certain that I heard him laugh aloud and shout, "Peeeeg!" in a mocking falsetto, on that last, amazing night that I spent at the farmhouse. There was the clatter of sharp hooves on the bare floor of the hall, and the unmistakable grunting snuffle of a hog. The incongruous sound passed along the corridor to the end where Harris' cubbyhole of a room was. I strode to my door and flung it open—and it was at that moment I heard Harris' roar of mirth and the malicious, "Peeeeg!"—as if he were calling the swine to dinner. I accused him of it later, but he denied it. If that had been all I might have been able to persuade myself that my imagination was responsible, but it was not all—not by any means.

As a child, I have a vague memory of a tremendously fat man attending the funeral for my mother and father. This I think must have been the first time that ever I saw him, but I am sure that I did not set eyes on him again for over fifteen years. Although, there is much of my unhappy childhood that I have forgotten, Uncle Alfred's grotesque figure must have stood out in my memory in all its terrifying bulk.

After all those years, I met Uncle Alfred as the result of a rather uncomfortable coincidence. Having left the university with an excellently engraved but otherwise worthless degree, I was at length fortunate enough to obtain a job in New York City as a process server. In most cases, to serve a defendant with a summons requires little more skill than that which might be expected of an errand boy, but it does occasionally happen that considerable ingenuity is necessary. Such a case was that of Uncle Alfred.

When my employer gave me the summons for Alfred Fry, he told me that he had been trying to serve it for months and that he had exhausted every dodge in his head. "Try anything you can think of," he said. "I'm beginning to believe the man doesn't exist."

I said, "If he's the man I think he is, the job's as good as done!" And I left the office with a vision of my triumph in my mind. "It was easy," I would say on my return. "Why, there was nothing to it, at all!"

Alfred Fry lived in a big graystone house, just off Fifth Avenue — a town house—a residence—the stately, ugly, dignified sort of dwelling that millionaires inhabit. The front doors were plate glass and wrought iron, and as I rang the bell it occurred to me that it would be far from safe to put my foot in the crack when the door was opened.

PRESENTLY a haggard, sickly-looking butler asked me my business. "Is Mr. Alfred Fry at home?" I asked. The butler believed that Mr. Fry was not at home. I said, "If you should happen to find him somewhere in there, would you tell him that his nephew, Julian Barrow, would like to pay his respects?" The butler stared at me doubtfully, and I repeated, "Julian Barrow."

The butler said, "I'll see if Mr. Fry is in," and started to close the door. Before the latch clicked, I said, "Tell him I don't want to borrow any money!" He disappeared into the interior darkness without making any sign of having heard. After what seemed a long time, he returned and said, "Mr. Fry will see you."

I followed the butler through a long, gloomy hall that was draped and carpetted in dark red and gold. There were several massive pieces of carved furniture, the sort of thing that seems to have been made for the lobbies of hotels whose guests are giants: chairs too large for one person, but too small for two—tables too high for convenience—mirrors too large for comfort. We came to a broad oak door where the butler stopped. Murmuring, "Mr. Fry is in the study," he swung it open, and I went in.

FROM behind his enormous desk, my uncle peered at me. "So!" he said in a high, thin voice, "you are Julian!"

"And you," I said, "are Uncle Alfred. I remember you." And the odd thing is that I did actually remember him. Seeing him again, I wondered how his memory could ever have grown so dim. It was like seeing a motion picture, or a play, for the second time, inadvertently; though apparently you had forgotten everything about it, with the first sequence the whole thing comes back in complete detail. I suppose he had changed—he must have changed in fifteen years!—but it seemed to me that I remembered him exactly as I saw him now.

The man was a hog: that is the most accurate, if not the most charitable way to put it. Not having seen him, you may conclude that Uncle Alfred was merely a sufferer from some such disease as dropsy or elephantiasis. But he was no invalid. On the contrary, he appeared to be in the best of health and spirits—like a vigorous hog. His head was huge and bald except for a few long strands of straight, black hair on the crown; the bulging jowls began just below the rounded brow and descended in a sweeping curve that cradled the chin; the nose was short, the tip raised in such a way that it seemed to be lifting the upper lip, also; the eyes were small, closely-set, and so deeply imbedded that the lids were not visible. They were keen, restless eyes that darted from object to object as if in hungry search for something. (I caught myself wondering what he was looking for: a carrot? An ear of corn?)

"Well, sit down!" he said. "Sit down, my boy! The last time I saw you, you were a baby—and now—look at you—a grown man! Tell me how you are—what you're doing. Did you know that you are my nearest living relative?" His eyes made a quick search of the room for nearer relatives.

It amused me to think of the summons in my pocket and of how angry my uncle would be when I served it on him, and it seemed to me that the longer I delayed, the greater the joke, so I sat down and answered his questions volubly. His curiosity about my life somewhat surprised me, for in the past his interest and his help would have been eagerly welcomed. But he had ignored my existence, and had even failed to reply to my guardians' letters.

Uncle Alfred was obviously impatient with the account I gave him of my childhood. He grunted and twiddled his fat thumbs that just managed to meet across his belly, and it was not until I mentioned my fiancée that he seemed to prick up his rather pointed ears.

"Ah!" he said. "You must tell me all about this girl! Her name?"

"Annette Worth."

"She is young? Of course. Beautiful? Surely. You love her very much?"

"Why, yes," I said. "Certainly." His sudden eagerness annoyed me in some obscure way.

"You are a lucky boy—a lucky boy." He sighed reflectively. "And when is the marriage to be?"

Before I could draw breath, he answered his own question. "Why, that depends on Uncle Alfred. That's why you came here, today. 'Will Uncle Alfred give his loving nephew enough money so that he can be married'?"

I was angry, but at the same time, delighted. How could he have stepped into the trap more effectively? I got to my feet and smiled down at his obese head. "Why no, my dear uncle," I said. "My reason for coming here was nothing of the sort. It was simply a matter of business." I reached into my pocket and drew out the paper. "I have here a summons for one Alfred Fry. It gives me pleasure to serve it on you!" And I slapped it down on the desk in front of him.

He snatched it up in his puffy hands and let out a squeal of rage that was exactly like the "eeee-yeee!" of a pig caught under a gate. I laughed at him and started toward the door.

"Wait!" he called after me. "Wait, Julian!"

I turned, and was amazed to see that his face was creased and folded into a kind of porkine smile. "Don't go. Come back and sit down. This"—he picked up the summons and flung it aside—"doesn't mean anything. I should have had to settle the case eventually, anyhow. I'm sorry for what I said—now be a good boy, come back—and let's be friends."

I had nothing to lose, and although I did not like my uncle, his remarkable change of manner excited my curiosity and impelled me to accept his invitation. It was as simple a thing as returning to my chair that altered the whole probable course of my life.

My uncle sang a tune to the title: Blood Is Thicker Than Water. It was a sweet, subtle melody, and well-calculated to fall pleasantly on my ears. I was broke, and I was in love; Uncle Alfred was rich and lonely; and after all, I was his nearest blood relative—the logical person to inherit his fortune. With a hint of tears in his shoe-button eyes he described to me the misunderstanding and ridicule that had cursed his life. He had no friends, a woman's love he had never known, even his own relations (among them, his brother, my father) had refused him their sympathies. In short, it was a melancholy recital. Late in the afternoon he began to plead with me to invite Annette to his house, and nothing would do but that we must stay to dinner.

FROM the moment of Annette's arrival, Uncle Alfred's manner changed again; he stopped his moaning, and became on the instant a picture of pathetic and almost absurd gallantry. In every way possible he showed Annette that she was welcome—that she was much more than welcome.

As the evening wore on, he became more and more outspoken in his praises both for Annette and for me; we were his beloved, long-lost niece and nephew, the darlings of his old age sent by Providence to comfort his final years. In leaving him, the last thing that he said to us was: "Remember, children—I have great plans for you! Great plans! Great plans for us all!"

When we were out on the street, and the door closed behind us, I asked Annette, "Well, what do you think of him?"

"The poor old man," she said. "It's not his fault he's so fat."

"Perhaps not entirely," I said. "But to judge by the way he acted at dinner, he had something to do with it."

"You mustn't be too critical—he seems awfully fond of you—"

"Yes," I said, as much to myself as to her. "And I would very much like to know why."

I was a long time finding the answer—if I ever did.

We saw Uncle Alfred frequently in the days that followed. I do not recall exactly how he first introduced the subject of his farm, but each time we visited him he talked more and more enthusiastically of it. Strictly as a farm, it was nothing, he told us—only a few acres in the hills, up-state. An old house, dating from Revolutionary times, that had been restored and modernized, a small orchard, a plot or two of vegetables. But the pigs! That was the attraction for him. He boasted that he had six of the finest pens of pedigreed hogs in the country, and when he spoke of them, it was with the same admiration and affection that a hunter lavishes upon his dog.

Shortly after our first meeting, Uncle Alfred insisted that Annette and I spend a

weekend with him at the farmhouse. We found the place much as he had described it—a rather charming old building set among ancient fruit trees. At a little distance there was a modern barn which was flanked by a series of elaborately constructed pig pens. I had always thought of pigs as wallowing in mud and refuse, but these pens were as clean and dry as the cage of any animal in the zoo. Each enclosure contained four well-groomed hogs.

George Harris lived on the place and acted as caretaker. He is a lanky, leather-skinned farmer, surly in manner, taciturn, and completely without humor of any civilized variety. From the beginning, however, I was conscious of a bond of sympathy between Harris and me; unspoken and unadmitted, I believe it was none the less real.

Annette was more charitable than I. She loved the house, the pigs did not disgust her, and she was even able to persuade herself that Uncle Alfred's almost insane fondness for them was somehow praiseworthy. Even when he would get into the pen with them, scratch their bristly backs with a stick, call them individually by name, and grunt crooningly at them, Annette felt only a kind of sorrow for the loveless life that had brought my uncle at last to pigs.

On that first evening at my uncle's house in New York, he had said, "Remember, children—I have great plans for you!" But I doubt very much if he spoke the truth. Instead, I think he realized that eventually he would have a plan—when he had had time to devise one of sufficient intricacy. When the scheme finally emerged, it was so delicately constructed, so beautifully balanced, that I completely failed to recognize it.

ONE night my uncle said, "Julian, my boy—I don't know if I ever told you that I have several important business interests in South America. As you can see, I am not built for traveling, so I have always employed agents to represent me. But agents are not always entirely trustworthy. Now if only you could speak Spanish—"

The offer expanded slowly and alluringly, like dawn that begins with a line of light on the horizon and gradually sets the whole sky a-blaze. First, I would give up my miserable job, and devote my entire time for a period of three or four weeks to the study of the South American enterprises, and to learning enough Spanish to handle my uncle's affairs. Then, Annette and I could be married, and sail to Rio for our honeymoon. The salary would be large, but even this was not all. In addition, Uncle Alfred proposed to make me his sole heir. There was one other detail: Uncle Alfred insisted that Annette give up her work and the room where she lived. He wished her to stay at the Savoy Plaza, at his expense. Laughing, he said that she must begin to accustom herself to life as the wife of a rich man.

The month of preparation went according to my uncle's schedule; Annette spent most of her time shopping for her trousseau, and my days were filled by my studies.

On the date set for our marriage, we three went to the farm where it was my uncle's whim to have the ceremony performed. We would spend the night there, and sail in the morning for Brazil. All the arrangements were in Uncle Alfred's hands—hiring the minister, buying the tickets, and so on. Apparently he enjoyed playing Lord Bountiful, for his face was like a smiling mould of jelly.

When we arrived at the farm the weather was unnaturally warm and threatening; heavy, sluggish clouds hung low in the sky, the air was oppressively still, and it seemed to me that I could feel the vibration of distant thunder, though it was not yet audible. Even the hogs seemed affected by the sultry atmosphere; they were restless

and irritable, and kept up an annoying squeal of complaint.

Uncle Alfred's gaiety was somewhat dampened by the discovery that George Harris was absent without leave. He said that he supposed Harris would show up in time to feed the pigs, but meanwhile he strongly disapproved of the man leaving the farm alone, even for a short while. "Suppose something should happen to one of the hogs—with nobody here to help!"

Annette and I were in a state of comatose bliss; our new life lay before us, but it had not yet quite begun. With my arm around her, I remember wandering about the house and grounds — saying little, thinking of nothing but the future: the future that we owed entirely to the kindness of my uncle.

The minister was expected at two o'clock. At three he had not arrived, and since the sky was growing more and more ominous, I began to fear that if he did not come, soon, a storm might interfere with making the trip that day. Uncle Alfred said he would telephone to find out the reason for the delay. He waddled out of the living room, and down the hall to his own bedroom where the telephone was. As I heard his door close, I heard also the first deep growl of thunder.

The passage of time meant nothing to Annette and me, but I suppose it must have been more than half an hour later when Uncle Alfred appeared in the doorway and clapped his pink hand to his forehead in a gesture of despair.

"My God, Julian!" he groaned. "The most terrible thing has happened! I don't know how to tell you! I can't tell you!"

We stared at him. "What is it?" I demanded. "The minister—"

"No, not that. I tried to reach him, and there was no answer, so I suppose he's on his way. If it were only that!"

"Then what?"

"Afterwards, you see, I called my office. I won't stop to tell you all about it, now, but " he sighed deeply. "Julian, my boy, you must fly to Mexico City at once! My office has made a reservation for you on the earliest plane—we must leave here within an hour!" As I started to protest, he handed me a long envelope that was sealed in a number of places with red wax. "Here—take this! I will tell you about it before you go. Oh, Julian, I am so sorry about this! So sorry!" Then he sighed again, and added, "But journeys end in lovers' meeting, you know. Annette will follow you as soon as your mission is finished—"

I interrupted, "Why shouldn't she come with me now?"

"Ah!" he said. "There was another piece of bad luck! Terrible luck! There was only room for one more passenger on the plane. But don't worry—I'll send her to you at the first possible moment." He put his arm as far as it would go around her waist, and murmured, "Poor, poor girl—"

Annette looked at me with shining eyes. "It's all right—it's your job—and I can understand that. I'll follow you, darling."

"Of course she will" Uncle Alfred assured me. "And if there isn't time for you to be married here, she'll marry you wherever you are. Won't you, my dear?"

I WAS enraged by something indefinable in my uncle's manner—or perhaps it was by the situation, itself. In any case, I remember the insane itch to sink my fingers in my uncle's fat neck, to squeeze the life from his disgusting body. But I stood silent in the gloomy room, as if waiting for the next thing to happen. Annette released herself, came to me and put her hands on my shoulders; raising her head, she whispered, "Think of the future, darling. We'll be so happy for so long." I kissed her—and my anger was gone.

The thunder had grown louder, and

suddenly there was a piercing squeal from one of the hogs, as if it were being injured. My uncle trundled out of the room, calling back, "Come along, Julian! I'll tell you what you must know while I see what's the matter—" I held Annette a moment longer before I followed.

The sky was boiling black, with intermittent flashes of lightning on the horizon, but so far there was little wind, and no rain. The pens were over a hundred yards from the house, and not visible from it owing to the curve of the hill. As I started along the path, I heard steps behind me, and turned to see George Harris coming around the corner of the porch.

"Looks like bad weather," I said. "Where have you been? My uncle's been looking for you."

"Has he? Why? Anything missing?"

"Missing?" I repeated.

"I'll ask him, myself." We walked a few paces side by side. "I only came back for a saw I forgot."

We had topped the hill, and were looking down at Uncle Alfred who was bending over one of the hogs in the third pen before Harris' statement struck me as curious. I halted, and said, "What do you mean? Has something happened between you and Mr. Fry?"

"Why, sure. Didn't you know? I'm fired. He called me up yesterday, and told me to be off the place by this morning."

Distant lightning glinted in Harris' sardonic eyes as I gazed at him, wonderingly. Why had Uncle Alfred pretended to think that Harris would return? The answer was in a closed cell of my brain—I knew it was there, but I could not find it.

"That's strange," I said at last, and we went down the hill to the pen, inside of which my uncle was comforting one of his swine.

Without looking up, my uncle said, "Galahad has scratched himself on a nail, or something of the sort. Awful thing to happen at a moment like this—just when I've got to give you your instructions and send you off—"

Harris cut in: "Did you want to see me?"

My uncle was obviously startled. He jerked his head around, and exclaimed, "What! Oh—Harris. No, I don't want to see you—why would I? I spoke to you yesterday and I haven't changed my mind."

Harris nodded and leaned against the wall of the pen. My uncle stood up. Sweat was glistening on his forehead and jowls, his upper lips was raised over his yellow teeth, and he looked less human than usual. "Well?" he cried. "Get on about your business! I've got to talk to my nephew!"

"Sure," said Harris. "I just wondered if you knew the telephone line's been cut? I noticed it when I came around the house just now—"

"Damn you!" my uncle shouted. "Go on! Go on! I won't listen to your nonsense!" He turned to me. "Julian, you must hurry! Go before the storm breaks! You'll find the man at the address on the letter. I'll wire you there—I'll—"

At that moment the hog named Galahad broke away and trotted painfully to the far end of the pen—my uncle trotted after him. And then, a wide, blinding river of fire spilled out of the sky. I heard it sizzle and crackle before the thunder came, and before the thunder had echoed away I smelled the sulphur strong in the still air. I turned to Harris and said, shakily, "That was close!"

Harris was staring into the pen, a look of amazement on his face. As my gaze followed his, I, too, was amazed — my uncle had disappeared. I said, "Did you see him go? How did he get away so quickly?"

Suddenly the rain began to fall as if it were dashed out of buckets, but Harris remained a few seconds, leaning over the

wall of the pen. "Five!" I heard him mutter. "Yes, by God, five!"

I waited no longer, but ran back to the house where I arrived soaked and breathless.

Annette met me at thhe door, pale and frightened. "Wasn't the lightning ghastly? Where's Uncle Alfred?"

"Isn't he here?" And then it occurred to me where he must have gone. "Oh!" I said. "He's in the barn, of course—though how he got away so quickly, I can't imagine."

Harris came striding out of the rain and joined us on the porch. I noticed he was carrying the hand saw he had mentioned, and I asked, "Did you go into the barn?"

"Yes."

"Was Mr. Fry there?"

He looked at me in what I thought was a very curious way, but he made no answer, and I asked the question again. "Did you see Mr. Fry when you got your saw out of the barn?"

A strange, almost mocking smile spread over Harris' angular face; slowly he dropped the lid over one eye in an adagio wink, and at last he uttered the one syllable: "No."

"Then where is he?"

"If you don't know," said Harris, "I don't know."

Annette said, "You'd both better come in and dry your clothes. Anyhow, darling, you can't possibly get to the airport in this weather."

"No—these clay roads will be impassable for at least several hours. I suppose I had better phone Uncle Alfred's office to have them cancel the plane reservation—but I wish he'd come back here! I don't really know what to do."

Harris chuckled deep in his chest, and then I remembered what he had said about the telephone. I told him that he must be mistaken about it, because Uncle Alfred was making a call just a few minutes before.

Harris said, "Try it if you want to."

As I started out of the room, he asked, "Did you notice how many hogs there was in that pen we was leaning over?"

"Four," I said. "There are four in each of the pens. You know that better than I."

"There's five in that pen, now," Harris told me. "And next time you go down, I'll ask you to look close at one hog in particular—he's the biggest, and the fattest—and he's got no ring in his nose!"

Apparently this meant much more to Harris than to me. To me, the explanation seemed obvious: simply that Uncle Alfred had bought a new hog during Harris' absence. I did not begin to take the man seriously until I raised the telephone receiver to my ear. The line was dead.

THE discovery of the severed telephone was the first link in a chain of astonishing revelations. As soon as the condition of the road permitted, Annette, Harris and I drove down to the village of Oaktree. Through the drug store telephone I began to learn some of the truth about my missing uncle. Uncle Alfred had never spoken to the minister whom he had been expecting. I called the North-South Continental Company, which was Uncle Alfred's New York headquarters. They had never heard of an Alfred Fry. I called the airport and found, somewhat to my surprise, that there was a reservation in my name. In canceling it, I asked when the ticket had been bought, and whether there was more room on the plane. There was more room, and the passage had been reserved three days in advance. While I still sat in the telephone booth, Annette and Harris waiting outside, I tore open the elaborately sealed envelope Uncle Alfred had given me. It was addressed to "Carlos Diaz, Hotel Geneva, Mexico City," and it

contained two sheets of perfectly blank paper.

For the moment, the problem was too much for me. I went out and told Harris to notify the local authorities of Uncle Alfred's disappearance, and then to go back to the house and stay there until he heard from us or we heard from him.

"He looked at me owlishly. "What should I do about the hogs?"

"Damn the hogs!" I exclaimed. "What difference does it make to me? Do anything!"

"Even the—the new one?"

"Of course!" If I thought anything, I suppose I thought the man was talking about feeding the brutes.

Annette and I drove back to New York and went directly to Uncle Alfred's town house. The place was closed, shades drawn at all the windows, the front door locked.

There we were. The mystery seemed as complete as our despair.

But within the next few days, our fortunes took a sudden upward turn. I got a much better position than I could have hoped for, and within a short time Annette and I were married.

SO FAR as I know, Alfred Fry was never seen again. Although it seems impossible that such a tremendously fat man could vanish like an illusion in a distorting mirror, search has been made for him throughout the world, in vain. If he does not turn up in the time specified by law, his death will be legally presumed, and his considerable estate (which does not include ownership in the North-South Continental Company) will come to me. It seems I am his sole living relative.

I hesitate to speak of the night Annette and I spent at the farmhouse, because as a reasonable, unimaginative man I am not willing to argue the accuracy of my own impressions. We went up to the country shortly after our marriage, and within a month of my uncle's disappearance. The first thing I noticed was that the pens were completely empty, and I asked Harris what had happened to the hogs.

"Oh," he said, "I sent them to market. You'll be getting the check for them."

I said, "If my uncle ever shows up, he'll throw you in jail for it."

Harris grinned at me. "*If* he ever shows up."

After dinner, Annette, Harris and I talked once again about the mystery of Uncle Alfred. There was little doubt in my mind of what the old devil had planned and I was certain that if I had made the trip to Mexico, I should never have returned. As I said, whatever happened to him, and however it happened, it seemed to me that only the merest, eleventh hour luck had saved my life and spared Annette the most terrible fate. Harris said nothing, but sat staring into the firelight.

The sound woke me from a deep sleep, in the middle of the night—the clatter of hooves on the hardwood floor in the hall outside our door. I waited, listening, while the beast stopped and snuffled along the bottom of the door, as if food were just beyond his reach. Then the clatter began again as the hog started down the hall. I jumped out of bed, and was in the long, straight corridor before the trotting hooves had reached the end. There was nothing to see. As I stared into empty space, I heard Harris call, "Peeeeg!" and it seemed to me that the sound of the sharp hooves on the bare floor appeared to enter Harris' room, but the door neither opened nor closed.

Fortunately, the commotion had not awakened Annette, and I did not wish to frighten her, now. I sat up for the rest of the night, thinking. I shall not say what I thought, nor shall I advance any theories. But when the estate of my uncle Alfred Fry is settled, Harris shall have the farm.

The Liers in Wait

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

Could it have been that Oliver Cromwell, ruthless Puritan dictator of England, used the Black Arts to win his struggle with the Cavaliers?

Here lies our Sovereign Lord the King,
Whose word no man relies on,
Who never said a foolish thing,
Nor ever did a wise one.

—*Proffered Epitaph on Charles II*
John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester
(1647-1680)

YES, Jack Wilmot wrote so concerning me, and rallied me, saying these lines he would cut upon my monument; and now he is dead at thirty-three, while I live at fifty, none so merry a monarch as folks deem me. Jack's verse makes me out a coxcomb, but he knew me not in

my youth. He was but four, and sucking sugar-plums, when his father and I were fugitives after Worcester. Judge from this story, if he rhymes the truth of me.

I think it was then, with the rain soaking my wretched borrowed clothes and the heavy tight plough-shoes rubbing my feet all to blisters, that I first knew consciously how misery may come to kings as to vagabonds. F'gad, I was turned the second before I had well been the first. Trying to think of other things than my present sorry state among the dripping trees of Spring Coppice, I could but remember sorrier things still. Chiefly came to mind the Worcester fight, that had been rather a cutting down of my poor men like barley, and Cromwell's Ironside troopers the reapers: How could so much ill luck befall—Lauderdale's bold folly, that wasted our best men in a charge? The mazed silence of Leslie's Scots horse, the first of their blood I ever heard of before or since who refused battle? I remembered too, as a sick dream, how I charged with a few faithful at a troop of Parliamentarian horse said to be Cromwell's own guard; I had cut down a mailed rider with a pale face like the winter moon, and rode back dragging one of my own, wounded sore, across my saddle bow. He had died there, crying to me: "God save your most sacred Majesty!" And now I had need of God to save me.

"More things than Cromwell's wit and might went into this disaster," I told myself in the rain, nor knew how true I spoke.

After the battle, the retreat. Had it been only last night? Leslie's horsemen, who had refused to follow me toward Cromwell, had dogged me so close in fleeing him I was at pains to scatter and so avoid them. Late we had paused, my gentlemen and I, at a manor of White-Ladies. There we agreed to divide and flee in disguise. With the help of two faithful yokels named Penderel I cut my long curls with a knife and crammed my big body into coarse garments—gray cloth breeches, a leathern doublet, a green jump-coat—while that my friends smeared my face and hands with chimney-soot. Then farewells, and I gave each gentleman a keep-sake—a ribbon, a buckle, a watch, and so forward. I remembered, too, my image in a mirror, and it was most unkingly—a towering, swarthy young man, ill-clad, ill-faced. One of the staunch Penderals bade me name myself, and I chose to be called Will Jones, a wandering woodcutter.

Will Jones! 'Twas an easy name and comfortable. For the nonce I was happier with it than with Charles Stuart, England's king and son of that other Charles who had died by Cromwell's axe. I was heir to bitter sorrow and trouble and mystery, in my youth lost and hunted and friendless as any strong thief.

The rain was steady and weary. I tried to ask myself what I did here in Spring Coppice. It had been necessary to hide the day out, and travel by night; but whose thought was it to choose this dim, sorrowful wood? Richard Penderel had said that no rain fell elsewhere. Perhaps that was well, since Ironsides might forbear to seek me in such sorry bogs; but meanwhile I shivered and sighed, and wished myself a newt. The trees, what I could see, were broad oaks with some fir and larch, and the ground grew high with bracken reddened by September's first chill.

Musing thus, I heard a right ill sound —horses' hoofs. I threw myself half-downways among some larch scrub, peering out through the clumpy leaves. My right hand clutched the axe I carried as part of my masquerade. Beyond was a lane, and along it, one by one, rode enemy—a troop of Cromwell's horse, hard fellows and ready-seeming, with breasts and caps of iron. They stared right and left searchingly. The bright, bitter eyes of their officer seemed to strike through my hiding like a pike-point. I clutched my axe the tighter, and

swore on my soul that, if found, I would die fighting—a better death, after all, than my poor father's.

But they rode past, and out of sight. I sat up, and wiped muck from my long nose. "I am free yet," I told myself. "One day, please our Lord, I shall sit on the throne that is mine. Then shall I seek out these Ironsides and feed fat the gallows at Tyburn, the block at the Tower."

FOR I was young and cruel then, as now I am old and mellow. Religion perplexed and irked me. I could not understand nor like Cromwell's Praise-God men of war, whose faces were as sharp and merciless as, alas, their swords. "I'll give them texts to quote," I vowed. "I have heard their canting war-cries. 'Smite and spare not!' They shall learn how it is to be smitten and spared not."

For the moment I felt as if vengeance were already mine, my house restored to power, my adversaries chained and delivered into my hand. Then I turned to cooler thoughts, and chiefly that I had best seek a hiding less handy to that trail through the trees.

The thought was like sudden memory, as if indeed I knew the Coppice and where best to go.

For I mind me how I rose from among the larches, turned on the heel of one pinching shoe, and struck through a belt of young spruce as though I were indeed a woodcutter seeking by familiar ways the door of mine own hut. So confidently did I stride that I blundered—or did I?—into a thorny vine that hung down from a long oak limb. It fastened upon my sleeve like urging fingers. "Nay, friend," I said to it, trying to be gay, "hold me not here in the wet," and I twitched away. That was one more matter about Spring Coppice that seemed strange and not overcanny—as also the rain, the gloom, my sudden desire to travel toward its heart. Yet, as you shall see here, these things were strange only in their basic cause. But I forego the tale.

"So cometh Will Jones to his propet home," quoth I, axe on shoulder. Speaking thus merrily, I came upon another lane, but narrower than that on which the horsemen had ridden. This ran ankle-deep in mire, and I remember how the damp, soaking into my shoes, soothed those plaguey blisters. I followed the way for some score of paces, and meseemed that the rain was heaviest here, like a curtain before some hidden thing. Then I came into a cleared space, with no trees nor bush, nor even grass upon the bald earth. In its center, wreathed with rainy mists, a house.

I paused, just within shelter of the leaves. "What," I wondered, "has my new magic of being a woodcutter conjured up a woodcutter's shelter?"

But this house was no honest workman's place, that much I saw with but half an eye. Conjured up it might well have been, and most foully. I gazed at it without savor, and saw that it was not large, but lean and high looking by reason of the steep pitch of its roof. That roof's thatch was so wet and foul that it seemed all of one drooping substance, like the cap of a dark toadstool. The walls, too, were damp, being of clay daub spread upon a framework of wattles. It had one door, and that a mighty thick heavy one, of a single dark plank that hung upon heavy rusty hinges. One window it had, too, through which gleamed some sort of light; but instead of glass the window was filled with something like thin-scraped rawhide, so that light could come through, but not the shape of things within. And so I knew not what was in that house, nor at the time had I any conscious lust to find out.

I say, no conscious lust. For it was unconsciously that I drifted idly forth from the screen of wet leaves, gained and moved along a little hard-packed path between bracken-clumps. That path led to the

door, and I found myself standing before it; while through the skinned-over window, inches away, I heard noises.

Noises I call them, for at first I could not think they were voices. Several soft hummings or purrings came to my ears, from what source I knew not. Finally, though, actual words, high and raspy:

"We who keep the commandment love the law! Moloch, Lucifer, Bal-Tigh-Mor, Anector, Somiator, sleep ye not! Compel ye that the man approach!"

It had the sound of a prayer, and yet I recognized but one of the names called—Lucifer. Tutors, parsons, my late unhappy allies the Scots Covenentors, had used the name oft and fearfully. Prayer within that ugly lean house went up—or down, belike—to the fallen Son of the Morning. I stood against the door, pondering. My grandsire, King James, had believed and feared such folks' pretense. My father, who was King Charles before me, was pleased to doubt and be merciful, pardoning many accused witches and sorcerers. As for me, my short life had held scant leisure to decide such a matter. While I waited in the fine misty rain on the threshold, the high voice spoke again:

"Drive him to us! Drive him to us! Drive him to us!"

Silence within, and you may be sure silence without. A new voice, younger and thinner, made itself heard: "Naught comes to us."

"Respect the promises of our masters," replied the first. "What says the book?"

And yet a new voice, this time soft and a woman's: "Let the door be opened and the wayfarer be plucked in."

I SWEAR that I had not the least impulse to retreat, even to step aside. 'Twas as if all my life depended on knowing more. As I stood, ears aprick like any cat's, the door creaked inward by three inches. An arm in a dark sleeve shot out, and fingers as lean and clutching as thorn-twigs fastened on the front of my jump-coat.

"I have him safe!" rasped the high voice that had prayed. A moment later I was drawn inside, before I could ask the reason.

There was one room to the house, and it stank of burning weeds. There were no chairs or other furniture, and no fireplace; but in the center of the tamped-clay floor burned an open fire, whose rank smoke climbed to a hole at the roof's peak. Around this fire was drawn a circle in white chalk, and around the circle a star in red. Close outside the star were the three whose voices I had heard.

Mine eyes lighted first on she who held the book—young she was and dainty. She sat on the floor, her feet drawn under her full skirt of black stuff. Above a white collar of Dutch style, her face was round and at the same time fine and fair, with a short red mouth and blue eyes like the clean sea.

Her hair, under a white cap, was as yellow as corn. She held in her slim white hands a thick book, whose cover looked to be grown over with dark hair, like the hide of a Galloway bull.

Her eyes held mine for two trices, then I looked beyond her to another seated person. He was small enough to be a child, but the narrow bright eyes in his thin face were older than the oldest I had seen, and the hands clasped around his bony knees were rough and sinewy, with large sore-seeming joints. His hair was scanty, and eke his eyebrows. His neck showed swollen painfully.

It is odd that my last look was for him who had drawn me in. He was tall, almost as myself, and grizzled hair fell on the shoulders of his velvet doublet. One claw still clapped hold of me and his face, a foot from mine, was as dark and bloodless as earth. Its lips were loose, its quivering nose broken. The eyes, cold and

wide as a frog's, were as steady as gun-muzzles.

He kicked the door shut, and let me go. "Name yourself," he rasped at me. "If you be not he whom we seek—"

"I am Will Jones, a poor woodcutter," I told him.

"Mmmm," murmured the wench with the book. "Belike the youngest of seven sons—sent forth by a cruel step-dame to seek fortune in the world. So runs the fairy tale, and we want none such. Your true name, sirrah."

I told her roundly that she was insolent, but she only smiled. And I never saw a fairer than she, not in all the courts of Europe—not even sweet Nell Gwyn. After many years I can see her eyes, a little slanting and a little hungry. Even when I was so young, women feared me, but this one did not.

"His word shall not need," spoke the thin young-old fellow by the fire. "Am I not here to make him prove himself?" He lifted his face so that the fire brightened it, and I saw hot red blotches thereon.

"True," agreed the grizzled man. "Sirrah, whether you be Will Jones the woodman or Charles Stuart the king, have you no mercy on poor Diccon yonder? If 'twould ease his ail, would you not touch him?"

That was a sneer, but I looked closer at the thin fellow called Diccon, and made sure that he was indeed sick and sorry. His face grew full of hope, turning up to me. I stepped closer to him.

"Why, with all my heart, if 'twill serve," I replied.

"'Ware the star and circle, step not within the star and circle," cautioned the wench, but I came not near those marks. Standing beside and above Diccon, I felt his brow, and felt that it was fevered. "A hot humor is in your blood, friend," I said to him, and touched the swelling on his neck.

But had there been a swelling there? I touched it, but 'twas suddenly gone, like a furtive mouse under my finger. Diccon's neck looked lean and healthy. His face smiled, and from it had fled the red blotches. He gave a cry and sprang to his feet.

"'Tis past, 'tis past!" he howled. "I am whole again!"

But the eyes of his comrades were for me.

"Only a king could have done so," quote the older man. "Young sir, I do take you truly for Charles Stuart. At your touch Diccon was healed of the king's evil."

I folded my arms, as if I must keep my hands from doing more strangeness. I had heard, too, of that old legend of the Stuarts, without deeming myself concerned. Yet, here it had befallen. Diccon had suffered from the king's evil, which learned doctors call scrofula. My touch had driven it from his thin body. He danced and quivered with the joy of health. But his fellows looked at me as though I had betrayed myself by sin.

"It is indeed the king," said the girl, also rising to her feet.

"No," I made shift to say. "I am but poor Will Jones," and I wondered where I had let fall my axe. "Will Jones, a woodcutter."

"Yours to command, Will Jones," mocked the grizzled man. "My name is Valois Pembru, erst a schoolmaster. My daughter Regan," and he flourished one of his talons at the wench. "Diccon, our kinsman and servitor, you know already, well enough to heal him. For our profession, we are—are—"

HE SEEMED to have said too much, and his daughter came to his rescue. "We are liers in wait," she said.

"True, liers in wait," repeated Pembru, glad of the words. "Quiet we bide our time, against what good things comes our

way. As yourself, Will Jones. Would you sit in sooth upon the throne of England? For that question we brought you hither."

I did not like his lofty air, like a man cozening puppies. "I came myself, of mine own good will," I told him. "It rains outside."

"True," muttered Diccon, his eyes on me. "All over Spring Coppice falls the rain, and not-elsewhere. Not one, but eight charms in yonder book can bring rain—'twas to drive your honor to us, that you might heal—"

"Silence," barked Valois Pembru at him. And to me: "Young sir, we read and prayed and burnt," and he glanced at the dark-orange flames of the fire. "In that way we guided your footsteps to the Coppice, and the rain then made you see this shelter. 'Twas all planned, even before Noll Cromwell scotched you at Worcester—"

"Worcester!" I roared at him so loudly that he stepped back. "What know you of Worcester fight?"

He recovered, and said in his erst lofty fashion: "Worcester was our doing, too. We gave the victory to Noll Cromwell. At a price—from the book."

He pointed to the hairy tome in the hands of Regan, his daughter. "The flames showed us your pictured hosts and his, and what befell. You might have stood against him, even prevailed, but for the horsemen who would not fight."

I remembered that bitter amazement over how Leslie's Scots had bode like statues. "You dare say you wrought that?"

Pembru nodded at Mistress Regan, who turned pages. "I will read it without the words of power," quoth she. "Thus: 'In meekness I begin my work. Stop rider! Stop footman! Three black flowers bloom, and under them ye must stand still as long as I will, not through me but through the name of—"

She broke off, staring at me with her slant blue eyes. I remembered all the tales of my grandfather James, who had fought and written against witchcraft. "Well, then, you have given the victory to Cromwell. You will give me to him also?"

Two of the three laughed—Diccon was still too mazed with his new health --and Pembru shook his grizzled head. "Not so, woodcutter. Cromwell asked not the favor from us—'twas one of his men, who paid well. We swore that old Noll should prevail from the moment of battle. But," and his eyes were like gimlets in mine, "we swore by the oaths set us—the names Cromwell's men worship, not the names we worship. We will keep the promise as long as we will, and no longer."

"When it pleases us we make," contributed Regan. "When it pleases us we break."

Now 'tis true that Cromwell perished on third September, 1658, seven year to the day from Worcester fight. But I half-believed Pembru even as he spoke, and so would you have done. He seemed to be what he called himself—a lier in wait, a bider for prey, myself or others. The rank smoke of the fire made my head throb, and I was weary of being played with. "Let be," I said. "I am no mouse to be played with, you gibbed cats. What is your will?"

"Ah," sighed Pembru silkily, as though he had waited for me to ask, "what but that our sovereign should find his fortune again, scatter the Ironsides of the Parliament in another battle and come to his throne at Whitehall?"

"It can be done," Regan assured me. "Shall I find the words in the book, that when spoken will gather and make resolute your scattered, running friends?"

I put up a hand. "Read nothing. Tell me rather what you would gain thereby, since you seem to be governed by gains alone."

"Charles Second shall reign," breathed Pembru. "Wisely and well, with thoughtful distinction. He will thank his good

councillor the Earl—no, the Duke—of Pembru. He will be served well by Sir Diccon, his squire of the body."

"Served well, I swear," promised Diccon, with no mockery to his words.

"And," cooed Regan, "are there not ladies of the court? Will it not be said that Lady Regan Pembru is fairest and—most pleasing to the king's grace?"

Then they were all silent, waiting for me to speak. God pardon me my many sins! But among them has not been silence when words are needed. I laughed fiercely.

"You are three saucy lackeys, ripe to be flogged at the cart's tail," I told them. "By tricks you learned of my ill fortune, and seek to fatten thereon." I turned toward the door. "I sicken in your company, and I leave. Let him hinder me who dare."

"Diccon!" called Pembru, and moved as if to cross my path. Diccon obediently ranged alongside. I stepped up to them.

"If you dread me not as your ruler, dread me as a big man and a strong," I said. "Step from my way, or I will smash your shallow skulls together."

Then it was Regan, standing across the door.

"Would the king strike a woman?" she challenged. "Wait for two words to be spoken. Suppose we have the powers we claim?"

"Your talk is empty, without proof," I replied. "No, mistress, bar me not. I am going."

"Proof you shall have," she assured me hastily. "Diccon, stir the fire."

HE DID so. Watching, I saw that in sooth he was but a lad—his disease, now banished by my touch, had put a false seeming of age upon him. Flames leaped up, and upon them Pembru cast a handful of herbs whose sort I did not know. The color of the fire changed as I gazed, white, then rosy red, then blue, then again white. The wench Regan was babbling words from the hair-bound book; but, though I had learned most tongues in my youth, I could not guess what language she read.

"Ah, now," said Pembru. "Look, your gracious majesty. Have you wondered of your beaten followers?"

In the deep of the fire, like a picture that forebore burning and moved with life, I saw tiny figures—horsemen in a huddled knot riding in dejected wise. Though it was as if they rode at a distance, I fancied that I recognized young Straike—a cornet of Leslie's. I scowled, and the vision vanished.

"You have prepared puppets, or a shadow-show," I accused. "I am no country hodge to be tricked thus."

"Ask of the fire what it will mirror to you," bade Pembru, and I looked on him with disdain.

"What of Noll Cromwell?" I demanded, and on the trice he was there. I had seen the fellow once, years agone. He looked more gray and bloated and fierce now, but it was he—Cromwell, the king rebel, in back and breast of steel with buff sleeves. He stood with wide-planted feet and a hand on his sword. I took it that he was on a porch or platform, about to speak to a throng dimly seen.

"You knew that I would call for Cromwell," I charged Pembru, and the second image, too, winked out.

He smiled, as if my stubbornness was what he loved best on earth. "Who else, then? Name one I cannot have prepared for."

"Wilmot," I said, and quick anon I saw him. Poor nobleman! He was not young enough to tramp the byways in masquerade, like me. He rode a horse, and that a sorry one, with his pale face cast down. He mourned, perhaps for me. I felt like smiling at this image of my friend, and like weeping, too.

"Others? Your gentlemen?" suggested

Pembru, and without my naming they sprang into view one after another, each in a breath's space. Their faces flashed among the shreds of flame—Buckingham, elegant and furtive; Lauderdale, drinking from a leather cup; Colonel Carlis, whom we called "Careless," though he was never that; the brothers Penderel, by a fireside with an old dame who may have been their mother; suddenly, as a finish to the show, Cromwell again, seen near with a bible in his hand.

The fire died, like a blown candle. The room was dim and gray, with a whisp of smoke across the hide-spread window.

"Well, sire? You believe?" said Pembru. He smiled now, and I saw teeth as lean and white as a hunting dog's.

"Faith, only a fool would refuse to believe," I said in all honesty.

He stepped near. "Then you accept us?" he questioned hoarsely. On my other hand tiptoed the fair lass Regan.

"Charles!" she whispered. "Charles, my comely king!" and pushed herself close against me, like a cat seeking caresses.

"Your choice is wise," Pembroke said on. "Spells bemused and scattered your army—spells will bring it back afresh. You shall triumph, and salt England with the bones of the rebels. Noll Cromwell shall swing from a gallows, that all like rogues may take warning. And you, brought by our powers to your proper throne——"

"Hold," I said, and they looked upon me silently.

"I said only that I believe in your sorcery," I told them, "but I will have none of it."

You would have thought those words plain and round enough. But my three neighbors in that ill house stared mutely, as if I spoke strangely and foolishly. Finally: "Oh, brave and gay! Let me perish else!" quoth Pembru, and laughed.

My temper went, and with it my bemusement. "Perish you shall, dog, for your saucy ways," I promised. "What, you stare and grin? Am I your sovereign lord, or am I a penny show? I have humored you too long. Good-bye."

I made a step to leave, and Pembru slid across my path. His daughter Regan was opening the book and reciting hurriedly, but I minded her not a penny. Instead, I smote Pembru with my fist, hard and fair in the middle of his mocking face. And down he went, full-sprawl, rosy blood fountaining over mouth and chin.

"Cross me again," quoth I, "and I'll drive you into your native dirt like a tether-peg." With that, I stepped across his body where it quivered like a wounded snake, and put forth my hand to open the door.

There was no door. Not anywhere in the room.

I turned back, the while Regan finished reading and closed the book upon her slim finger.

"You see, Charles Stuart," she smiled, "you must bide here in despite of yourself."

"Sir, sir," pleaded Diccon, half-crouching like a cricket, "will you not mend your opinion of us?"

"I will mend naught," I said, "save the lack of a door." And I gave the wall a kick that shook the stout wattlings and brought down flakes of clay. My blistered foot quivered with pain, but another kick made some of the poles spring from their fastenings. In a moment I would open a way outward, would go forth.

REGAN shouted new words from the book. I remember a few, like uncouth names—Sator, Arepos, Janna. I have heard since that these are powerful matters with the Gnostics. In the midst of her outcry, I thought smoke drifted before me —smoke that stank like dead flesh, and thickened into globes and curves, as if it

would make a form. Two long streamers of it drifted out like snakes, to touch or seize me, I gave back, and Regan stood at my side,

"Would you choose those arms," asked she, "and not these?" She held out her own, fair and round and white. "Charles, I charmed away the door. I charmed that spirit to hold you. I will still do you good in despite of your will—you shall reign in England, and I—and I——"

Weariness was drowning me. I felt like a child, drowsy and drooping. "And you?" I said.

"You shall tell me," she whispered. "Charles."

She shimmered in my sight, and bells sang as if to signal her victory. I swear it was not I who spoke then stupidly—consult Jack Wilmot's doggerel to see if I am wont to be stupid. But the voice came from my mouth: "I shall be king in Whitehall."

She prompted me softly: "I shall be duchess, and next friend—"

"Duchess and next friend," I repeated.

"Of the king's self!" she finished, and I opened my mouth to say that, too. Valois Pembru, recovering from my buffet, sat up and listened.

But——

"STOP!" roared Diccon.

WE all looked—Regan and I and Valois Pembru. Diccon rose from where he crouched. In his slim, strong hands was the foul hairy book that Regan had laid aside. His finger marked a place on the open page.

"The spells are mine, and I undo what they have wrought!" he thundered in his great new voice. "Stop and silence! Look upon me, ye sorcerers and arch-sorcerers! You who attack Charles Stuart, let that witchcraft recede from him into your marrow and bone, in this instant and hour—"

He read more, but I could not hear for the horrid cries of Pembru and his daughter.

The rawhide at the window split, like a drum-head made too hot. And cold air rushed in. The fire that had vanished leaped up, its flames bright red and natural now. Its flames scaled the roof-peak, caught there. Smoke, rank and foul, crammed the place. Through it rang more screams, and I heard Regan, pantingly:

"Hands—from—my—throat——!"

Whatever had seized her, it was not Diccon, for he was at my side, hand on my sleeve.

"Come, sire! This way!"

Whither the door had gone, thither it now came back. We found it open before us, scrambled through and into the open.

THE hut burnt behind us like a hayrick, and I heard no more cries therefrom. "Pembru!" I cried. "Regan! Are they slain?"

"Slain or no, it does not signify," replied Diccon. "Their ill magic retorted upon them. They are gone with it from earth—forever." He hurled the hairy book into the midst of the flame. "Now, away."

We left the clearing, and walked the lane. There was no more rainfall, no more mist. Warm light came through the leaves as through clear green water.

"Sire," said Diccon, "I part from you. God bless your kind and gracious majesty! Bring you safe to your own place, and your people to their proper senses."

He caught my hand and kissed it, and would have knelt. But I held him on his feet.

"Diccon," I said, "I took you for one of those liers in wait. But you have been my friend this day, and I stand in your debt as long as I live."

"No, sire, no. Your touch drove from me the pain of the king's evil, which had

smitten me since childhood, and which those God-forgotten could not heal with all their charms. And, too, you refused witch-help against Cromwell."

I met his round, true eye. "Sooth to say, Cromwell and I make war on each other," I replied, "but——"

"But 'tis human war," he said for me. "Each in his way hates hell. 'Twas bravely done, sire. Remember that Cromwell's course is run in seven years. Be content until then. Now—God speed!"

He turned suddenly and made off amid the leafage. I walked on alone, toward where the brothers Penderel would rejoin me with news of where next we would seek safety.

MANY things churned in my silly head, things that have not sorted themselves in all the years since; but this came to the top of the churn like fair butter.

The war in England was sad and sorry and bloody, as all wars. Each party called the other God-forsaken, devilish. Each was wrong. We were but human folk, doing what we thought well, and doing it ill. Worse than any human foe was sorcery and appeal to the devil's host.

I promise myself then, and have not since departed from it, that when I ruled, no honest religion would be driven out. All and any such, I said in my heart, was so good that it bettered the worship of evil. Beyond that, I wished only for peace and security, and the chance to take off my blistering shoes.

"Lord," I prayed, "if thou art pleased to restore me to the throne of my ancestors, grant me a heart constant in the exercise and protection of true worship. Never may I seek the oppression of those who, out of tenderness of their consciences, are not free to conform to outward and indifferent ceremonies."

And now judge between me and Jack Wilmot, Earl of Rochester. There is at least one promise I have kept, and at least one wise deed I have done. Put that on my grave.

Some unseen force hurled his body squarely into the core of this purple flame!

Let us travel forward into the Future, to 2007 A. D. *. . . and there, only sixty-five years hence, fight alongside the scientists of that age—as they battle to ward off the menace which threatens to destroy the earth!*

Core of the Purple Flame

By ROBERT H. LEITFRED

WHEN the young scientist Aaron Carruthers finished computing the intricate problem before him on his desk, he closed his eyes as if to visualize the chaos these symbols denoted.

Thin beads of sweat formed on his high, intelligent forehead. Three times had he re-checked the problem to make certain there had been no error. He had even sent word to a colleague, George Vignot, to come to the laboratory and work out the problem in his own way just to make certain that there had been no mistake.

In a few minutes the big, bearded chemist, Vignot, would arrive. No chance that both would make the same mistake. And if Vignot's conclusions matched his own—well, the astounding and fearsome news would have to be sent out to the world on the Continental Television News panels.

Carruthers wiped his forehead. It was entirely possible that he was wrong. After all, he wasn't infallible. He tried to remember errors in calculations he had made in the past. But they were surprisingly few and were errors of haste rather than method. And there was no consolation in them.

Tiredness was upon him. He allowed his body to slump forward until his damp forehead rested in the crook of his arm. But he couldn't thrust the horror of the future from his mind. And while he tried to forget momentarily what he, alone in all the world knew, time kept ticking off its inexorable seconds and minutes. There was no stopping its remorseless march onward.

The year of time was 2007 as reckoned by the earth's new calendar, and was still the same world with its familiar continents and oceans as recorded by the historians of the twentieth century.

There had been wars, pestilence, famines and destruction undreamed of in the red decades following the rise of the dictator nations. Empires had spread their tentacles over most of the earth's surface —enslaving humans with their mephitic, bestial ideologies.

Then the people, as if inspired and guided by some soul-inspiring force outside their enslaved bodies, had risen in rebellion all over the world, thrown off their shackles, and annihilated their masters.

Scientifically and mechanically, the world had never stood still. There seemed to be no end to the inventive genius of mankind. But man, himself, had not changed—only the structures that housed him, and the mechanical marvels that surrounded him. He was still subject to greed, poverty and fear of the unknown.

In the world's largest city, New York, the month of Venus brought intolerable heat that drove people deep underground to ventilated caverns constructed when Venus had been known as the month of July. Those who were not in the caverns, or not working at daily tasks, were gathered before the Continental Television News panels where they watched rather than heard world news. Aside from the seasonal heat, there was nothing to mar the serenity of their daily lives.

Around them, as they stood watching the news flash across the panel from all parts of the globe, towered massive buildings. The tallest of these was the one where Aaron Carruthers' connecting laboratories covered the top floor of a hundred-story structure.

Looking from the quartz glass windows of these laboratories, one could see the steel control towers of New York's majestic transportation system—the four-speed sidewalk bands that extended north, south, east and west.

Subway and elevated trains no longer existed. Taxis and privately owned vehicles had been banished to the great open spaces known as the outlands.

This efficient transportation system, of escalator type, was high above the city streets, and extended north to Peekskill and west across the Hudson River into a teeming industrial center that had once been known as New Jersey.

The first band from the station platform moved quite slowly. The second, somewhat faster. By stepping from the slower to the faster-moving bands, passengers could easily control the speed they wished to travel.

There was little or no noise in this sprawling metropolitan area except the droning reverberations of turbines deep underground — turbines which supplied light, power and heat to all businesses, all families, rich and poor alike.

Even to this lonely, serious-faced young scientist there came moments of reflection when he marveled at the changes that had taken place during his own lifetime. But

he wasn't thinking about them now. They had been crowded from his mind by gloomy forebodings of an insecure future. This precious, yet terrible knowledge weighed heavily on his shoulders. He clenched his jaw and straightened to an upright position.

The red eyes of a golden Buddha on his desk glowed warningly. Someone was coming down the corridor to the entrance of his private laboratory.

Soundlessly the door opened. Through the opening came his friend and laboratory assistant, Karl Danzig. "Vignot's here," he stated, "and crusty as usual."

CARRUTHERS nodded. He liked George Vignot in spite of the bearded chemist's sarcastic, blustering ways. "Show him into the west laboratory where our Time Projector— No. Wait a minute. Vignot's not yet ready for that experiment. Show him instead into the Thermo-cell laboratory. We'll work on our problem there."

The eyes of Karl Danzig held worried glints.

He hesitated a moment then said: "You—you aren't going to test out the new Time Projector Machine—?"

"It all depends," shrugged Carruthers, "on whether certain computations I have made are correct in assumption and ultimate result. Vignot's undoubtedly the foremost mathematician in the east. And I want him to re-check my calculations for possible error. If he arrives at the same answer as I have, we'll make the experiment — provided he is willing and not afraid."

Still, Danzig did not leave the room. "In some ways," he went on, "I wish you'd abandon the experiment, Aaron. It's not that I'm disloyal, but it seems to me that you're going to get entangled into something that—that the universal creator doesn't want mankind to know. Somehow, it doesn't seem right for man to probe into the mystery of what has not yet happened."

Carruthers placed a hand on his friend's shoulder. "I'm not questioning your loyalty, Karl, when you oppose the experiment I've got to go through with. But I know you'll stand by till the end. Perhaps I'm asking for death in trying to do somethink that transcends the physical impossibility of tampering with the element of time.

"Still, being the way I am, there seems no other course open—for me at least. So don't have any doubts. We've been mixed up in strange and fantastic experiences before, and have somehow survived. Let's keep the thought in mind that we'll survive this one."

Danzig nodded. "I understand all that, Aaron. But you've never gone through anything like the experiment you've planned with the Time Projector Machine. You still don't know what effect it will have on your physical body."

"I've tried it on mice and they came back alive."

"Mice aren't human beings. It scares me, Aaron. Things that have happened in the past are history, and they're static in most ways. Things that are happening in the present are understandable and real. They are things you and I can get a grip on. I can touch my skin, my hair and fingernails, and feel them. They are the result of growth that extends into the past. They are also the result of growth that is taking place this very second."

"That's quite true, Karl. The sum of our knowledge is based on what is happening now, and what has taken place in the past. That being true, would not our knowledge be astoundingly increased in the revealing awareness of what is going to happen in—say a year from now, or a decade of years for that matter? Could we not arrange to meet misfortune and disas-

ter better if we knew what was to take place in the future?"

"You're getting into the realm of predestination, Aaron. And that is dangerous ground for man to invade. Suppose fate has willed that I am to die at eleven o'clock at night a year from today from coming in contact with fifty-thousand volts of electricity in this laboratory. Could you, by your foreknowledge of events that are yet to happen, cheat fate by having the current turned off so that I couldn't possibly be electrocuted?"

"I don't know, Karl, any more than you do." The shadow of some inner disturbance crossed his serious young face. When he spoke again his voice was low and vibrant. "But the scientific urge to find the answer to your question and others of my own propounding is greater than my emotional will to resist that urge. I've got to find out, Karl. My mind won't rest, nor my body either, until the answer to the riddle comes to me out of the impalpable element of a time period that has not yet taken place. Go get Vignot now, and bring him to the Thermo-cell laboratory. And I'll want you with us, Karl, for reasons you'll discover for yourself."

Without another word he turned and walked down a tile corridor to a white, gleaming laboratory. A few minutes later Danzig, with George Vignot close behind him, entered the room.

GEORGE VIGNOT spread his feet wide and puffed out both cheeks. "So!" His voice had the booming quality of a deep organ note. "It isn't enough that I should be plagued by inconsequential classroom experiments I have performed a thousand—yes, a million times. No. I must fritter away my precious moments with arithmetic, with figures which *you* seemed to have forgotten—"

"Wait a minute, Vignot—"

"Ha. Wait? Always I'm waiting. Where is this Time Projector? Speak up, for I have no time to waste on trivialities. Certainly it isn't in this room. It wouldn't be. You'd keep it hidden. I don't want to see it. I don't want anything to do with it. The last experience I had with your Neutronium exploration apparatus nearly drove me insane. I damned near starved to death, too. No. Count me out of any future experiments dealing with the unknown. I'll stick to my moronic classroom lectures—"

"I suppose," Carruthers broke in, "that I could easily persuade the noted bio-chemist, Haley, to assist me, or Professor Grange the metallurgist whose experiments and findings have lately startled the world. Not being concerned with petty classroom sessions, they'd undoubtedly—"

"Bah! Haley's a doddering fool. And Grange is afraid of his own shadow. Petty classroom sessions, eh? You brought that up, Aaron, just to goad me on into doing something I don't want—"

Carruthers shook his head. "I wouldn't urge you to do anything you don't want to do, or have your heart set on doing. Go back to your classroom. I'll find someone else."

Vignot's big body shook with gusty laughter. "Oh ho! I should go now after I'm already here. You should get rid of me like I'm an incompetent scullion who keeps dropping beakers and test tubes. I'm not so good as Haley or Grange. So now. What is that problem in arithmetic?"

"The arithmetic will come in a few minutes." He pointed to a marble-topped table. "First, I want you to check the readings on the tape from the Thermo-cell unit recordings."

"Hummm!" grunted Vignot, crossing the room to the table and bending over the intricate machine which indicated and traced the pattern of any electrical or metallic disturbances in the outer reaches of the sky.

Since he was familiar with the unit, he had no difficulty. "Solar disturbances as usual," he muttered, "but no radio signals or undiscovered mass formations—wait a second. Maybe I'm wrong. The indicator won't remain on the zero line. Ah! There is a disturbance caused by the presence of matter. It's center—let me calculate roughly—just as I thought—about seventeen degrees to the left of the planet Neptune."

"Well?" Carruthers' voice had a touch of impatience.

Vignot peered at a map of star constellations on the nearest wall. "You tell *me*, Aaron. There's nothing but bleak emptiness in that part of the sky. It's a place where time seems to stand still, where distances from one body to another are fixed at millions of miles. It's a vast immensity where there is no light, no heat, no sound, and nothing more substantial than occasional streamers of dark, gaseous clouds."

He turned to Carruthers and spread his hands, palms upward. "The disturbance is caused by a comet. Any astronomer could have told you that much. It's that simple."

"Not quite," said Carruthers. "I thought of comets. On the table beside the Thermo-cell unit you'll find charts. The top one was made in 1967, and based on figures and negatives furnished me by the Palomar Observatory. Plotted on this chart are the paths of various wanderers of the sky—meteors, asteroids and comets. None of them are to be found in the sky area on which the unit's detector beam is centered.

"On the second chart you'll find the periodic comets and their paths across the heavens. Biela's comet, first observed in 1772, returns every seven years. It isn't due again for five years. Rule that one out."

Vignot shrugged. "Go on," he urged.

"Following it is one discovered by Encke. Its period of visibility at a fixed point in the sky occurs every three years. Then Halley's comet comes along with a period of seventy-six years, followed by Donati's which appears at intervals several thousand years apart. None are due this year —or now."

George Vignot tugged thoughtfully at his beard. "I see," he nodded. "But all this talk about comets must mean something. What?"

Carruthers watched both men seat themselves in comfortable chairs but made no motion to follow their example. Instead he began to pace the floor. "I didn't say anything about comets. You brought them into our talk yourself. The thing that is causing the disturbance on the sensitive plates of the Thermo-cell unit might be a planet or a star, or a globe like our own inhabitated with human beings.

"Or it may be nothing more than a sphere of black gas with a metallic core because it isn't yet visible. And it's out there in that bleak emptiness as, you call it, beyond the gravitational pull of Neptune. It's still impossible to correctly determine its size or structure. But if the Thermo-cell unit is accurate to within one tenth of a degree, that invisible body is headed toward our earth at a tremendous speed which will accelerate to an even greater velocity as its expanding gases drive it onward. And unless it meets with some other mass in the sky, it should be hurling itself in a mighty cataclysm against our earth—"

"GOOD Lord," breathed Vignot. "When does all this take place?"

"That's the problem in arithmetic you so caustically referred to. We have its location in the sky. We have its speed—"

"Speed?" Vignot looked doubtful.

"That can be determined by examining the strength of the first disturbance signals on the cell plate recording tape. Each day they have grown stronger. By comparing this difference from day to day—"

"I know how to calculate speed, Aaron. The point I still don't understand is this. That Mass out in space may be pointed at our earth right now. But our earth isn't stationary. We're revolving around the sun once every three-hundred and sixty-five days. Also, in the course of a year, our whole planetary system is moving at an incredible speed away from where it is now. In other words, our earth after each journey around the sun never returns to the identical spot from which it started. The Mass should miss us by a million miles."

"That's possible," admitted Carruthers. "And I'd like to believe you. Since, however, I've figured it out mathematically, I've come to the conclusion that your theory is not justified. The collision takes place ten years from this summer or fall. And that will be the end of the world, and of the Moon, too. A collision of such catastrophic proportions is bound to draw our Lunar neighbor into the earth's attraction so that the Mass, Moon and Earth will come together and merge into a sphere of flaming whiteness."

Vignot scoffed. "Phooey! Where is your copy of Einstein's calculator of variable factors of time and space?"

From his pocket Carruthers removed a leather-bound book and handed it to his colleague. Then he sat down.

"Very well," announced Vignot. "We'll see." He sprawled across the marble-topped table and began his tabulations which he fitted into complicated equations. From time to time his forehead wrinkled with thought. Then pure concentration erased everything from his face except a hard, purposeful glow in his eyes.

An hour passed with no interruption from either Carruthers or Danzig. They sat relaxed in their chairs, waiting. Vignot's pencil covered scratch papers with numerals and symbols. Occasionally he blinked as the figures began to take on meaning. Finally he pushed the papers aside and looked up.

"Your calculations agree with mine, Aaron. We'll have ten years of worry, floods, earthquakes, cyclones—then absolute chaos."

Carruthers said nothing for the moment. Instead he got to his feet, crossed the room to the quartz glass windows and stared uneasily across the roofs of the great city. After a time he turned from the window, walked to the table and examined Vignot's tabulations.

"You used a different arrangement of symbols and calculation devices than those I used," he acknowledged. "But you arrived at the same answer—the year of 2017. It looks," he added, "like absolute annihilation—which means the end of the world."

"I wish," sighed the bearded chemist, "you hadn't sent for me." He blinked owlishly. "Absolute annihilation beyond a doubt . . . unless . . . unless the earth's air barrier should prove heavy enough to turn it from its course. His eyes stopped blinking. Instead, they stared straight into those of the young scientist. "You propose to do something about this collision, Aaron. What?"

"I'm still mortal, Vignot, and human as the next man. What *can* I do?"

Vignot wagged his head impatiently. "That's not exactly what I meant. You've got something on your mind that you haven't yet explained to me. I want to hear it—now."

"Even if it means death before the Mass strikes the earth?"

"Even if it means death within the next twenty-four hours," snapped the bearded chemist.

THE voice of Aaron Carruthers became low and purposeful. "Ten years is a long time to wait for death especially when we know there is no way to avoid it. Yet,

in those ten years, we will have ample time to erect our defenses and seek a way to destroy the Mass—if such a miracle is possible."

He paused as if searching for the right words. "Vignot," he continued. "Would you like to know today—now, just how fatal this coming catastrophe will be?"

"I don't quite understand."

"What I mean is this. Through the remarkable emanations of my Time Projector Machine, I can—"

"Don't do it." Karl Danzig was speaking for the first time. "You'd both be fools. There's nothing to be gained by submitting to such an experiment. You'd both be destroyed in the Thoridium Rays. I'm against the experiment utterly and completely."

"Quiet, Karl," advised Carruthers. "This is between Vignot and me."

"Ah!" sighed Vignot. "A difference of opinion. I never knew you two ever to disagree before. The prospect intrigues me. And since I don't expect, and don't want to live forever, I have little fear of death. Only I don't want to die by slow starvation. I want my meals regular. I want—Ummm. Go ahead, Aaron. And please don't interrupt him, Karl. I'll weigh my chances of survival after hearing a few facts, then I'll make my decision."

"My plan," said Carruthers, "is to project our bodies into the year of 2017—"

"Impossible!" Vignot scoffed.

"Suicidal," added Danzig. "Let's abandon the whole business."

Carruthers eased his lanky body from the chair. He didn't smile, but there was a forceful, inner gleam in his eyes that lighted his whole face.

"There is no other way out for me," he told them, "but to go ahead with my plan. And once I have closed and locked the door to the Time Projector laboratory, I don't expect either of you men to violate my aloneness in that room. Should I come out alive within the next twenty-four hours, I will have the answer to the earth's salvation in my head. Should I fail to return and unlock the door—the task of informing the world of its ultimate end lies with you both." He smiled then. "I guess that's all." With these words he left them and went swiftly down the corridor.

BUT Aaron Carruthers was not alone when he reached the door to the Projector laboratory. Vignot and Danzig were close behind.

"So!" boomed Vignot. "You want to get rid of me now I'm here and have checked on your arithmetic. You want to make your experiment alone and leave me and Karl behind. Nonsense. We're in this crazy experiment as much as you are. Your dangers will be our dangers."

"Vignot's right," agreed Danzig. "I won't say another word, Aaron. Let's get started."

"I'm grateful to you both," sighed Carruthers, opening the door. "Come in, please. The room is more or less upset, but the apparatus is in perfect working order."

They entered.

"Hmmmm!" grunted the chemist. "What is this machine—an atom smasher?"

Carruthers nodded. "A variation of the main principle, but it goes much farther in its delving into the core of life. This ponderous machine, though much smaller than those giants in use at the government's research laboratories, has successfully bombarded that rare element of Thoridium, atomic weight 319, with heavy neutrons thereby stepping its weight up to 320. And since the even-numbered atoms are explosive, the Thoridium split into two parts creating the greatest energy ever produced by man."

He held up his hand as Vignot attempted to break in. "Wait a minute. Let me continue. This energy explosive and

powerful though it is when harnessed to our new atomic motors, has produced a by-product of weird potentialities. When I imprisoned this energy within a vacuum prism of Saigon's metallic glass, I became aware of a most singular phenomenon. This energy, when sealed in a vacuum, quickened the pulse of the universe, and shattered the world's yardstick of time. That is—the force of this newly-created energy is so potent, so far beyond anything man has yet dreamed of, that it moves faster than time itself. A paradox? Perhaps. But it is the sole actuating force of the Time Projector."

Vignot tugged at his beard. "These transparent walls around projector walls. What is their purpose?"

"Pure quartz. An outside as well as an inside wall with water between to keep the emanations from escaping. Karl, you'd better switch on our own power. I don't want to chance any fluctuation of the city current if I can help it. And phone the building engineer to start our basement dynamos."

A moment after Danzig had carried out these orders, the laboratory began to vibrate gently.

"There isn't much to be seen," explained Carruthers, "but the control board, the insulated chairs with their contact helmets, and the 21-inch circular prism of Saigon's metallic glass suspended between plastic posts which keeps the prism rigid."

He indicated the chairs. "Sit down, please, both of you. Karl, you take the chair near the power control station. Vignot, you sit in the center chair. And I'll take the one on the right which enables me to control and regulate the forces sealed within the Thoridium power plant which actuates the Time Projector. Is it all clear?"

"Not quite," said Vignot. "This metal helmet . . ."

"Place it over your head the same as I'm doing. And I'm warning you, Vignot, that you're going to be subject to some pain and bewildering sensations. Keep both palms on the metal handrests of the chair, and don't look at me, or at Danzig. Keep your eyes and mind focused on one point only —the Saigon prism."

He turned to the control panel beside him. "Now. I'll adjust the cycle of our explorations into the time period ten years in advance of this hour with an automatic shut-off just in case—"

"One more question," observed Vignot. "What part of us is it that goes forward in space?"

"All of us, and yet no part of us, for our bodies will actually remain here in these chairs. Always keep that in mind no matter what happens. We may be injured. We may be killed. But that will be in the future. And when the experiment has ended, we will find ourselves in these same chairs, neither injured or dead, but exactly as we are at this moment."

"Go ahead," snapped the chemist. "This waiting has become intolerable."

"Contact, Karl. The energy tube series first, using the odd numbers. Then switch to the even ones with a ten-second interval between. First contact. Good. Careful now—three, four, five—not yet—seven, eight, nine—contact points of the even-numbered series—Close your switch!"

FROM somewhere inside the laboratory came a sputtering crack. And across their field of vision shot a serpentine streamer of deep-red flame. It impinged against the prism and flowed over it like red dye.

Within the metal walls of the Thoridium power plant there was a sound like an imprisoned gale escaping. Carruthers listened for a disturbed moment, then he brought his mind back to the prism.

He saw it glowing redly then change slowly to orange and through the orderly

prismatic scheme of yellow and blue to violet. He braced himself for what lay beyond the violet. This was the breaking point between the present and the unknown future.

A gradual mistiness engulfed the laboratory, the prism and the Thoridium power plant.

The vibrations within the laboratory seemed to lessen in intensity. An eerie silence muffled all sounds. Almost imperceptibly the mist became denser. It enveloped the plastic posts like streamers of fog, then swirled around the glowing prism in a translucent, ghostly halo.

Its effect was hypnotic. He couldn't move his eyes. His mind lost its alertness and became sluggish. Slowly the violet glow faded into a color beyond the purple —a color he had never seen before.

This strange and unfamiliar hue distressed him, made him uneasy. He knew he was seeing something nature had never intended man to see, and in seeing it, he was being punished. Still, there was no way he could stop it. The experiment had passed beyond his control.

Restlessness crept over him in slimy coils of doubt. He felt light-headed and unstable as if his body was suspended over a deep abyss and would at any moment drop into black, terrifying silence that would last forever.

There were no thoughts in his mind of the other two men. The spell of the prism had erased them completely from his memory. He had even forgotten why he was sitting in the chair, staring at the scintillating, changing effulgence of the space-quickening prism.

It was then that lightness and darkness seemed to be struggling for supremacy. Dark would follow daylight. And daylight would follow dark. At first, these changes were slow and labored. Gradually, however, they quickened in tempo until the space between his eyes and the prism that held them in thralldom flickered with lights and shadows.

He sensed, somehow, that these flickerings were caused by the swift passage of days and nights. And he knew that he was moving forward into time.

How long he remained in this state of mind suspension he never knew. The end came following a torturous succession of sounds and sensations. He became aware of a monotonous ticking in his ears. Cold enveloped him that quickly changed to a devitalizing heat. Dimly, at first, he sensed a change in his surroundings. Things seemed to be the same, yet different. The prism suspended between the plastic posts was diminishing into space. To his ears, after the peculiar ticking had subsided, came strange sounds like the lament of thousands upon thousands of voices.

It was like a dirge of despair, of hope abandoned, of fear and anguish. It seemed purposeless and without meaning. Suddenly, and without warning, a ball of purple, eye-searing radiance exploded all around him.

The last link between the present and the future had snapped. In the vortex of the concussion some unseen force gripped him, and hurled his helpless body squarely into the core of this purple flame.

There was no pain, no sensation in this weird phenomenon. There was only forgetfulness and memory failure. He had successfully crossed the unknown abyss of ten years in less than seven earth minutes. And he never knew it.

Part II

STANDING before the quartz glass windows, Aaron Carruthers watched the exodus of human beings from the great city. Never had he seen the four-speed transportation bands so jammed with people.

The sight of the continuous stampede

made him sad. He knew why they were leaving the hot pavements of the city and fleeing to the seashore, lakes and rivers. He knew, also, that wherever they went, whatever they did, they could not escape. The world seemed doomed.

Each day the glowing Mass in the sky was drawing steadily nearer and increasing in size as it came closer. It was so bright that it could be seen by day. Its brilliance was like that of a small sun. And its heat more intense.

He turned from the window. As he reached his desk he noted the small calendar. The year of 2017 still had four months to go. Probably it would be the last year in the history of mankind. The door to the corridor was opening. Through it came Danzig and Vignot. Their faces were red and moist with sweat.

"It's what you might call warm outside," complained the chemist. "And it isn't going to get any cooler either. Everybody is leaving the city. As a matter of fact all the cities are being abandoned. Wherever there is a lake, river or any body of water, the populace is flocking toward these blessed spots. Any news?" he finished.

"None," said Carruthers, grimly, "but what you already know."

"How is your Annihilator progressing?"

"It's about finished—or it should be. I'm making an inspection trip in a few minutes. Better come with me."

"You think it will work?"

Carruthers shrugged, and his jaw tightened. "How can I be absolutely certain. It should work by all the laws of science. At any rate, it's too late to worry as to whether it'll work or not. If it succeeds, we'll live to know. If it doesn't, I don't know as it will matter. We'll be nothing but powdered ashes. If you're ready now, we'll go to Thunder Mountain at once."

They left the laboratory, went to the roof and there boarded a rocket ship which carried them north to the site of what might prove to be the world's last folly in scientific engineering.

From the air as the ship approached the landing field on top of Thunder Mountain towered a giant steel tube that at first glance seemed puny when viewed from the great heights of the air. But once the rocket ship had landed, and the men reached the workings, its monstrous size became apparent.

Through a new metallurgical process, the metal tube had been cast in a block without seams or rivets. It towered nearly three-hundred feet upwards from its base, and was roughly fifty feet in diameter. What the tube contained inside only a few men understood.

Its purpose—to annihilate the approaching Mass of vegetation and earth by a continuous bombardment of its metal core with a concentrated beam of heavy neutrons. People, including many famous scientists, had scoffed at the sheer audacity of the idea. It was preposterous and doomed to failure.

Yet, in spite of opposition from all quarters, Aaron Carruthers had gone ahead perfecting the Annihilator. It had taken him years to figure out the construction and beam control. First there had been a small model which hadn't worked. That was the first setback. The metal of which he had constructed the first tube wouldn't stand up under the terrific onslaught of neutrons pouring from the electro-carbonide rods. Even the best of the metallurgists had been unable to furnish him with the right kind of metal.

Quite by accident Carruthers discovered a formula he had once used to replace a Tungsten wire within a vacuum tube of an electronic oscillator resistor coil. Using this formula, he had constructed a second machine. The metal walls of the tube on this second machine not only took the beating from the neutrons, but also increased their

power by keeping them into a solid beam that could be directed into space without endangering any metallic substance near at hand.

And this was the machine they had come to inspect. It had been erected on a high mountain away from any city. Its foundations were anchored deep in bedrock. Steel cables, their tension controlled by pneumatic shock absorbers, kept the metal tube from swaying in the high winds that constantly swept the mountain top.

Current for the dynamos beneath the structure came from a power-station at the base of the mountain. Yet no one knew, even Carruthers himself, whether this mammoth tube, pouring forth a controlled stream of annihilating neutrons, would be of sufficient power to break up the Mass hurtling toward the earth. But the young scientist had gone too far with his preparations to abandon them for something equally unpredictable. The Mass must be destroyed.

Even in the light of day men all over the world could see that it was coming steadily nearer and nearer. Occasionally it would flare into a white brilliance as it crashed into a meteor or wandering planetoid. But these collisions did not turn it aside. It came on and on, never swerving never slowing up.

Its heat spread out before it, increasing each day. Now the glowing Mass was in the east, now in the west as the earth circled lazily around the sun. The temperature continued to rise steadily night and day from seventy, to ninety, to a hundred and three. On this day it had reached a hundred and seven.

As Carruthers walked swiftly toward the metal structure that was destined to play so important a part in the world's salvation, the construction engineer came to meet him.

"It's no use, Carruthers," he said, grimly. "We're near the end of the job, but not yet finished. All the men are quitting. It's too damned hot. They can't stand it."

"Hire more men," ordered Carruthers. "The work's got to go on. We can't stop now. Don't you understand the importance—?"

"I'm simply explaining the facts."

"Hire more men as I said, and work them three hours a day at double pay for a full day's work."

"I'll do the best I can," nodded the engineer, "but I make no promises that the work will continue according to schedule. It isn't that the men don't want—" He stopped abruptly and stared stupidly at the young scientist.

The earth was trembling. A sudden flash of bluish light struck the top of the mountain, swirled like a miniature cyclone, then vanished in a thunderous, splitting crack. The shock knocked every man down.

Carruthers scrambled to his feet. He had known this was coming. Earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, enormous tides and floods all over the world would be the natural result of the approaching Mass. And his heart began to pound with unknown fears.

Yet there was no sign of fear on his face as he stood erect once more and then braced himself against the next ground upheaval. His eyes swerved upward. The steel tube was rocking perilously. One of the cables had come loose from its anchorage in the ground.

He raced toward its free end whipping crazily at the tube's base. But he never reached it. Something else claimed his attention. He kept on running to where the ground sloped away sharply, and checked suddenly on the raw edge of an earth crevasse six feet wide. He understood now why the cable had pulled loose from its anchorage. The earth had split in a wide seam, and from it began to roll thick clouds of brownish smoke.

Coughing, he stepped back and stumbled over a coil of rope. He gathered it up, fastened one end around the steel cable, and looped the free end around the base of a pine tree.

Hardly had he finished when the ground began to rock in a grinding movement from east to west. He dropped to his hands and knees. Smoke, pouring from the widening crevasse, enveloped him with noxious fumes.

His courage at that moment dropped to a low ebb. Was this to be the end of his years of patient and heart-breaking work? Was the world going to lose its one chance of survival because of an unpredictable eruption underground. He rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand. They were smarting from the fumes belching from the fissure.

Voices that were indistinct reached his ears. He closed his eyes against the smoke and staggered toward the sound. A hand closed around his arm and he heard Danzig speaking.

"We've got to get down from this mountain, Aaron. Some deep earthquake disturbance has almost split Thunder Mountain in two."

Carruthers continued to rub his eyes. "And leave the work of years unfinished, Karl?" He shook his head. "You can go if you want to. You're under no obligation to remain. But I'm staying right here. I've work to do—work that can no longer be delayed. I wasn't prepared to start the bombardment. There's still a great deal of equipment lacking. However, I have no choice. Leave me alone now. I'll carry on."

"But, Aaron. You can't. If these shocks continue, they'll cause the base of the Annihilator to disintegrate. It's almost ready to topple right now."

A gust of wind swirled across the mountain top driving the smoke away from the giant structure. "See?" pointed out the young scientist. "The tube is still standing. And as long as it stands, I believe there is hope. I'm starting right now to unleash the heavy neutrons. There can be no more delay."

"And I'm going to remain with you," promised Danzig. Turning, he ran toward the steel hatchway leading inside the metal tube.

Carruthers started to follow. Then his eyes wandered toward the smoking crevasse some distance away. Even as he watched it, the distance across its top continued to widen. The wind slackened, and smoke billowed around him. Groping blindly, he crashed into George Vignot. Together both men stumbled toward the opening in the metal tube.

Danzig slammed the metal door shut. "I think we're all three of us fools, Aaron. We ought to have gone with the others. No telling how long this mountain will remain in existence."

Carruthers seemed not to have heard. He went at once to the glittering panel of his ether-vision machine. Seating himself before it he kicked a switch forward with his foot, clicked two more with his right hand, and slowly began to revolve a dial.

The silver surface of a magnetic vision screen became fogged and slightly agitated. This lasted but a few seconds until the space tubes warmed to their utmost efficiency. Then the silver of the magnetic screen faded slightly and turned to a greenish blue.

Noise flowed from the sound track, the crunch of running feet, of men gasping and panting. A second later the directional beam found them and reflected them on the screen. They were the workers, and they were fleeing down the mountain road to safety. Behind them crawled and billowed a dark, boiling liquid.

Carruthers reversed the scene until the directional beam slithered back up the mountain. He saw then the source of the

dark liquid. It was flowing from the lower side of the crevasse halfway down the mountainside.

"Well," he sighed, "as long as nothing happens to the power lines, we'll be able to carry on. Check on all the mercury stabilizers, Karl, so that the floor will be perfectly level. Force more of the mercury into the cylinders with the auxiliary pressure pump if you have to. Then, if the walls of our tube start rocking, the floor will remain on a level keel."

With eyes still on the magnetic screen he turned the directional beam on all points of the compass to determine the extent of the earth split. Both ends of the crevasse seemed to have curved away from the plateau on top of the mountain, so there seemed no immediate danger of the base of the Annihilator crumpling.

"I hope," sighed Vignot, tugging aimlessly at his beard, "that the commissary in connection with this venture is well stocked."

"So far as I'm aware," announced Carruthers, "there isn't a crumb of food on this mountain top." He placed a special filter over the magnetic screen and sat down. Turning the directional beam slowly, he focused it on the sky. Into the panel swam the menacing sky Mass.

He watched it for several minutes as if contemplating something evil. It looked larger than when he had first seen it that day in his own laboratory. He decided to bring it closer. Without taking his eyes from the magnetic screen he switched on the current generated by the Class Y motors. Beneath the screen a battery of infra-red tubes began to glow. The Mass in the sky began to quiver and expand.

The directional beam continued to bore outward under the increased power. The Mass came closer. Carruthers calculated swiftly. It would take five, no seven minutes before its glowing reflection entirely covered the magnetic screen.

He got up from before the ether-vision panel. "Open the hood at the top of the tube, Karl, and set the angle of the annihilator beam at 29.97. That's where it should be at this hour and minute."

"Dials on the mercury cylinders register zero all around," announced Danzig. "The element of error appearing is minus two degrees from the west. That should change the angle of the annihilator beam to 29.95. Right?"

"Right," nodded Carruthers. "Set it at that angle. Everything ready to start now?"

"Everything's perfect."

"Good. Come over here and sit down. Keep an eye on the Class Y motors. I don't want anything to happen to them. Otherwise we wouldn't be able to look so far out into space." He examined the reflection of the Mass on the magnetic screen. It filled nearly two-thirds of it by now. He waited until the reflection of the Mass covered the entire screen, then set the dial and locked it against accidental turning.

"Time for the fireworks, Karl." His voice was grim. "Afraid, either of you?"

"I'm merely hungry," Vignot grinned. "And you, Karl?"

"No," said Danzig. "Give the Annihilator everything it's had built into it. If it's too much, we'll never know. If it's not enough, we'll have something to worry about."

CARRUTHERS smiled. "Here goes." He crossed the room, stared upward for a moment, then down at the insulating pad beneath his feet before the switchboard, took a deep breath and closed the circuit of the main switch.

Blinding violet light curved down from a spot high in the tube. He staggered back from the switchboard, stunned but otherwise unhurt. Temporary blindness assailed him. He stood still for a moment waiting for his eyes to adjust themselves to the

unearthly radiance bathing the inside of the metal walls.

A screeching howl filled the interior of the tube. It lasted for perhaps five seconds. Abruptly it changed to a high, thin hum. He groped his way back to the chair, his heart beating wildly. The die was cast. From now on there could be no turning back.

DANZIG thrust something in his hand. "Here. Put these on before you look up at the rods."

Carruthers adjusted the polaroid glasses to his eyes and looked upward into the flame-lashed vault of the tube. High above him glowed two electro-carbonide rods. They were tilted at an angle and their tips were ten inches apart. Across this gap poured streamers of violet fire. Where the flame points converged, there hung a ball of white, pulsating fire. Unless there had been some error in calculations, billions upon billions of heavy neutrons were flowing in a concentrated beam into the sky straight upon the Mass that moved on the earth.

"How much power in reserve?"

"Two million volts," said Danzig.

"Step it up five-hundred thousand."

Danzig bent forward. The whine of an unseen dynamo took on a swifter thrumming. "Five hundred thousand," he announced.

Carruthers watched the pulsing rays between the ends of the electro-carbonide rods, nodded approvingly, removed the polaroid glasses and walked to a small window set in what looked like a lead coffin. Inside this container was the heart of the Annihilator. Smoothly polished mirrors of the world's newest metal deflected the neutrons from their erratic courses and pointed them in a straight line toward the target they were supposed to hit and destroy.

There was no immediate way of knowing whether the neutrons were impinging against the metal core of the Mass, or whether they were wasting themselves in sky space millions of miles from the target. Astronomical observers had given Carruthers the exact angle in relation to the mountain top where the machine had been erected. Now there was nothing more to do but to keep blasting away at the target.

Minutes passed into hours. No one spoke. There seemed nothing anyone could do or say. As the earth turned on its axis, the stream of neutrons from the Annihilator was kept on the target by the automatic adjuster.

When the Mass reached the far western horizon and was no longer visible, Carruthers shut off the power. There was nothing more to be done until the Mass appeared in the eastern sky at dawn.

He turned to Danzig. "Karl, we have no electronic phones, nor have we any means of keeping in touch with the outer world save with our ether-vision machine. While we can see with this, we can't talk or act. Our success in carrying out this experiment depends solely on the current we are receiving from the power-station at the big dam near the base of the mountain. Go there at once. And don't let anyone shut off that power."

"That's all very well," boomed Vignot. "But you can't expect me to stay cooped up here. Surely there must be something I can do . . ."

"There is," said Carruthers, "much as I hate to have you leave. I would like to know the full extent of the disturbance that rocked this mountain and nearly split it in two. If there has been a ground shift of even a few degrees, it might well throw off all our calculations. I don't believe, however, that the slippage of earth has been upward. More than likely it has been downward so that its movement disturbed only surface soil and not the basic rock."

"It'll take time, Aaron. I'll have to

walk until I can find some faster mode of travel. But I'll return as soon as I can."

The three men shook hands. Their eyes met. If they wondered whether they'd ever see each other alive again, they showed no signs of it. A moment later, Aaron Carruthers was alone in the giant metal tube on Thunder Mountain.

MORNING found him at the controls again, a little haggard and more than a little worried. No one had come up the mountain with food. Meanwhile the temperature had risen to 115 degrees.

The glowing Mass swam in the eastern sky, climbing slowly to the zenith of the heavens. And all that first full day the Annihilator bombarded it with billions upon billions of neutrons apparently without noticeable effect. At night the Mass sank triumphantly beyond the western horizon.

It returned again at dawn of the second day. But Aaron Carruthers was waiting for it with renewed determination. Once more he released the annihilating beams of neutrons. At noon that day the heat had become almost unbearable. Sweat poured from the young scientist's forehead and into his eyes. He wrapped a handkerchief around it and remained stubbornly at the controls.

The afternoon dragged endlessly. His ears ached with the humming of the annihilator beams as they streamed across the gap between the ends of the electro-carbonide rods and sped toward the hot, glowing Mass.

By nightfall, when Danzig still hadn't returned, Carruthers searched for him with the directional beam of the ether-vision machine. He found him alone in the isolated power-station. The plant was deserted. All the workers had fled. By now the temperature had risen to 125 degrees Farenheit.

Carruthers moistened his lips, turned the directional beam on random spots of the country, and saw nothing but turmoil and unrest. In the south there was little to be seen but dense clouds of forest fire smoke. Wherever he looked he saw jammed highways, and deserted communities.

On the northeast seaboard of the Atlantic he saw immense upheavals of thunder clouds, sheets of lightning and swollen rivers. Still farther north, clear beyond Labrador, were muddy torrents that had long since overflowed their banks.

Westward and still farther north probed the ether-vision beam across the wilds of northern Canada to Alaska and beyond. Stark pinnacles of rock were thrusting their serried ranks through what had once been everlasting ice peaks. The age-old glaciers were being thrust back under the intense heat.

Throughout the night the young scientist checked every spot on earth and the answer was the same. Even the Moon had lost some of its coldness, and was covered with vapor. A new magnetic point had developed which threw shipping and air transports into a panic. One by one the great hydro-electric plants went dead, as dams, weakened by the tremendous pounding of flood waters, were rent asunder.

The lone watcher's heart beat with compassion whenever the directional beam picked up groups of humans in attitudes of prayer. No longer did sweat pour into his eyes. His body ached, and his skin was dry as parchment. He searched around outside and found a corrugated iron can filled with warm water. From it he drank and sloshed his head and face with the blessed moisture.

Somehow, he got through the night, rational and sane.

THE third day of his silent battle dawned redly. He saw the Mass the moment it rose above the eastern horizon and into

the magnetic-screen of the ether-vision panel.

Definitely the Mass had lost some of its energy. Its white-yellow radiance was turning to a cherry red. Hope surged in the heart of the young scientist. He switched on the current to the electro-carbonide rods. The interior of the annihilator housing crackled with violet flames as the heavy neutrons were shot outward in sky space. He was almost certain now that the Mass was undergoing a process of disintegration.

He examined the thermometer. One hundred and thirty degrees. Was the Mass actually turning red, or were his eyes failing him? He looked sharply at different points within the metal structure. No tinge of red obscured his vision.

Logic came tardily to his rescue. Though the Mass was definitely cooler than on the first day, its heat was still great for it had approached hundreds of thousands of miles closer to the earth.

At noon, when it was directly above the Annihilator, Carruthers switched on the maximum power which he had hesitated on using before. The increased humming of the tortured rods was more than his eardrums could stand. He packed his ears with small pieces of linen torn from his handkerchief.

Continued tension forced him to get up and move around. He went outside and bathed his face with warm water. Afterwards he went back to the ether-vision machine to see what was now happening in the world around him. Since he hadn't changed the directional beam, the first thing to appear on the magnetic screen was the image of the thing which menaced the earth.

As Carruthers stared at it he became aware of something that had lately happened. Running from the north to its southern axis across the face of the Mass was a blackish line. It had the appearance of a split in the Mass surface structure. As he tried to bring out details in sharper relief he heard the door open and close behind him. Vignot had returned.

"Ha!" chuckled the bearded chemist. "Thought I wasn't coming back, didn't you? Well, I thought the same thing several times. I've had to walk most of the time. Every vehicle that could be charted has been pressed into service by other people."

He mopped his forehead. "The situation is unchanged as far as my mission is concerned. I couldn't discover a thing. I've gone to three different seismographic locations where the science of earthquake phenomena is studied and traced, and found instruments and laboratories deserted and desolate with emptiness. You've no conception how panicky this world has become. Then my practical nature asserted itself and I managed to purchase some food capsules."

He extended a handful of the capsules to the young scientist. "I've been living on them since this morning. Until something happens either for good or evil, this is all we're going to eat. The base of this mountain is flooded with a thick, tenacious substance known as pitch. The road is blocked with it. I had to scramble over a great many boulders to get across the barrier. And that's all the bad news I can think of."

"It's quite enough," shrugged Carruthers, "and it's not important. Take a look at the magnetic screen." Then, as if aware for the first time of the food capsules Vignot had given him, he began to eat them slowly and thankfully. Almost at once new strength began to tingle throughout his tired body.

George Vignot studied the reflected image of the Mass for a considerable period before speaking. "Definitely," he stated, "the Mass has undergone some violent changes since I saw it last. It's actually

cooling off. That much is apparent from the change in color. And judging from the dark line running from top to bottom, I'd say that it has already begun to crack up from the bombardment."

"The line is widening fast," said Carruthers. "We should know definitely what is happening in a short time."

As both men watched speechlessly, the black line began to widen. The Mass lost its roundness. Its sides began to expand until it assumed the form of a rubber ball that was being pressed from the top downward.

CARRUTHERS leaned forward, concentrated the directional beam on the dark path and stepped up the power so that he could see better what that darkness signified.

As the expanding dark line flowed into the screen, the outer edges of the Mass became invisible, for the screen wasn't large enough to produce the full image.

For a few minutes there was nothing visible. Then, as the powerful beam of the ether-vision machine penetrated the shadows, they saw a pin-point of light in the very center of the blackness. And suddenly the darkness rolled back. Through it shot a ball of what looked like cloudy vapor.

The heat of the Mass dissipated it slightly, but not altogether. It kept rolling outward with gathering momentum until it was no longer a part of the Mass, but separate from it and moving through space at a tremendous speed. So swiftly did it come forward that its size filled the magnetic screen with what seemed like glittering moisture.

Carruthers adjusted the beam at a different angle. When the cloud of vapor was visible again, it was far from the parent Mass.

"Look, Vignot!" he gasped. "The Mass has opened up and disgorged something, and it's breaking into two indefinite sections which are fading into dust. The Mass is disintegrating!"

"But the vapor cloud," breathed Vignot, also leaning forward. "Keep it in sight every minute. Better shut off the flow of neutrons. They won't be needed any longer."

Carruthers pulled the switch. The electro-carbonide rods cooled and turned black. When he reached the control panel of the ether-vision machine again, the vapor cloud had vanished.

He angled the directional beam for a long time before picking it up again. When he did finally overtake it, the cloud was really getting close to the earth. As they watched it, they saw a number of tiny bright specks slanting out of the vapor which by now was almost dissipated.

Light from the sun struck against them. They glittered like molten fire as they fell toward the earth.

"God!" breathed Vignot. "What are they?"

"Metal or glass cylinders at first glance," guessed Carruthers. "Too far away yet to know definitely. But they'll never reach the earth. They'll be burned up when they pass into the air barrier above our globe. I've counted them. There must be twenty in all." He cringed as a bright burst of flame enveloped the lowest of the cylinders.

"There goes the first one. Burned to nothing in the friction . . ."

"Wait a second, Aaron. You knew about the new additional magnetic attraction that's affecting compasses all over the world. Well, I think I've solved the mystery. It's this machine of yours. The magnetic field forms when the neutrons start shooting into space. Turn on your electro-carbonide rods again. But shoot the neutrons off to the east so they won't destroy those shining things falling to earth. And if they're made of metal as

they seem to be, the magnetic attraction may pull them toward this mountain.

"A good point." Carruthers nodded approval, lowered the intensity of the current flowing through the rods and switched on the Annihilator. Carefully he changed the angle so that the discharge was activated to the east. Almost at once the shining things responded to the pull. Instead of falling vertically downward, they twisted slightly so that the points of their metal bodies were aimed toward the magnetic field set up by the annihilator beam.

Those that were slow in responding were destroyed by friction within the earth's air barrier. Three of them, however, got through the barrier. An hour before sunset these three shining things moved down upon the earth. No longer was it necessary to follow their course with the ether-vision machine. Both men moved out into the open and stared into the sky at the shining things that had come out of the sky's vast immensity.

"They may be rocket cylinders," said Carruthers, shading his eyes against the setting sun, "except for the fact that they're pointed on both ends. Certainly, they're man-made."

"They certainly are," agreed Vignot. "But made by what race of men? Aaron, this is the most astounding and fabulous . . ."

"They're falling this way," Carruthers broke in. "The magnetic attraction is . . . Oh! They're out of it. And now they're falling vertically."

They waited and watched with fear-expanded eyes. One of the shining things disappeared into the lake behind the power-station dam. A second nosed hissingly into the still smoldering crevasse down the mountainside.

A miracle preserved the third and last from destruction. It struck the tops of a dense growth of pine trees glancingly. Their great, arching trunks bent but did not break. Small branches snapped. Needles showered to the ground. But the force of the metal object's speed had been slowed to such an extent that it remained intact and scarcely dented when it finally slithered through the branches to the ground less than a hundred feet from where the two men stood watching it.

They raced toward it. The shining thing, a metallic cylinder at least eight feet in length, gleamed and sparkled in the fading sunlight. But before they reached it something happened that checked their impetuousness. Carruthers felt his breath snag deep down into his throat.

A section of the cylinder was opening slowly as if on hinges. The last, lingering rays of the setting sun revealed what at first seemed a dazzling apparition—an angel without wings, crowned with a golden aura of flame. And then the goddess from another world stepped from the cylinder.

Out of the dim recesses of his mind, from some memory cells that seemed to have been dormant for a thousand years, arose a cloudy picture that Carruthers knew had always been there. This girl was no stranger. He had seen her before. She was a part of some past experience as elusive as dancing shadows. Within his heart stirred a lively breeze. It was as though the creator had returned to him something he had loved and lost in the mouldy centuries of another existence.

SHE stood for a time on the daintiest slippered feet, clothed in soft, transparent clinging garments that followed every curve of her splendid, unashamed body. Her golden hair was gathered into a knot at the nape of her bare neck. Her eyes, indefinite as to color, were startled as a fawn's. She seemed poised for instant flight as she stood just outside the door to the cylinder.

Neither man made any motion to come

closer to her for they did not want to frighten her. Never had Aaron Carruthers been so stirred emotionally by any earth being as he was by this exquisite creature from outer space. His eyes were grave as he searched her face for some sign that she was the one he had known in the dim, ageless past. He smiled reassuringly, but he could not recall when and where he had known her.

Fear had vanished from her eyes. She had glanced only casually at the bearded chemist. Her attention was centered wholly on the other earth being. Long and searchingly she watched him, noting his shoulders, his chin, his deep-set eyes, and the high, intelligent forehead.

Suddenly her chin quivered. She raised both hands to her mouth. For a moment she seemed undecided as to what to do. Some poignant memory was shining in her eyes. She took a slow, uncertain step forward, then broke into a run, both arms outstretched.

Carruthers was conscious of but one thing as her arms encircled him and he felt the warmth of her body pressed close to his own. This girl was no figment of his imagination. He had known and loved her in the past. She was his—she would always be his. She was real. She was as real as the sun's afterglow glinting on her hair, and the quickening beat of his heart that matched the beat of her own.

She raised her face to his and he kissed her tenderly. But her face was troubled. She pointed upward and spoke in a tongue that was strange to his ears.

He shook his head. He didn't know how to explain to her what had happened to the rest of the cylinders that had been ejected from the Mass. He pointed toward the spot where the sun had vanished. "Sun," he explained. He indicated the wide sweep of heavens. "Sky." Downward he pointed. "Earth." Then, pointing at himself: "Aaron."

"Ar—ron," she repeated. Her eyes brightened responsively. "Ishtar," she added in a musical voice.

His eyes were bewildered.

She pointed at herself as she had seen him do and seemed afraid that he would not understand. But his smile reassured her. She backed from his arms, her eyes once more straying aloft into the sky as if searching for something in the red sunset. After a moment they clouded with disappointment and tears.

Carruthers again held out his arms. She came into them sobbing and trembling in her grief. And he held her tightly, possessively.

"Bah!" rumbled the bearded chemist.

And the sound seemed to set the mountain tumbling and crashing about the young scientist's ears in a splitting orgy of sound and confusions. Violet lightnings stabbed his brain, numbing it with soothing anaesthesia.

He could feel himself falling—falling—falling!

THE white walls of the laboratory reappeared before his eyes. Against this background he could see the Time Projector whose potent power had carried him ten years into the future. He removed the metal helmet from his head. Vignot and Danzig had likewise recovered and were following his example.

Carruthers, himself, broke the first silence. "Do either of you remember all that happened?"

"Only the last three days," said Danzig. "I was working alone in a strange powerstation which had been abandoned. That's all I seem to remember."

"And you, Vignot?"

"My memory is cloudy. I recall seeing a calendar dated 2017. Also I had an interest in seismographic disturbances. I also recall that I was hungry, that I could obtain only food capsules, and that I was

very uncomfortable during those last few days."

"And nothing else?"

"Oh yes. The Mass was destroyed by a bombardment of heavy neutrons. It disintegrated completely."

"And you can't recall any details of the annihilator machine?"

"It was *your* invention."

"I seem to have forgotten."

"But you haven't forgotten that the Mass was destroyed, and the world saved from a fate that hung over it for ten years?"

"No."

"Or the shining things that come showering down from the sky?"

"No."

George Vignot snorted and rumpled his hair. "You've got ten years in which to perfect that annihilator machine again. And you'll do it. Can't help it. You've already done it. That much is settled even if we can't prove it. I'm going back to my classes. When you need help, call on me and I'll come. But don't expect too much. I'm only a messy chemist. I'm not a miracle worker."

He left the laboratory and was shortly followed by Danzig, leaving the young scientist to solve the problems that were to face him in the future.

Carruthers walked to the quartz-glass window and stared into the twilight encompassing the city. But his mind was not on the problem of destroying the Mass that would eventually threaten the earth. He was thinking of those last, precious minutes on Thunder Mountain.

"Ten years," he breathed, as if talking to someone far off in space, "is a long time to wait for you again, Ishtar—a long time to await your second coming since you first appeared out of the void of outer space. Where are you now, and what are you doing?"

He waited patiently, but no answer came out of the present. It lay in the future—ten years of research and toil.

The lights winked on in the teeming caverns of city streets one hundred floors below his window. The throb of the underground turbines beat familiarly against his ears as if to bring him back to a more normal way of life.

But nothing would ever be normal from now on. Nothing would ever be quite the same. Nothing would ever erase the memory of her from his mind. For he knew that no matter what might happen during the next decade, the pattern of his life would flow on to its ultimate conclusion. That Ishtar, the girl from outer space, would come rocketing down from the sky in the shining thing. And he would hold her again in his arms. This was his Alpha and Omega. The beginning, and the end.

"No! No!" he babbled, "not that!"

Chameleon Man

By HENRY KUTTNER

He was a changeable sort of fellow—and on occasions resembled a piecemeal zombie assembled by someone entirely ignorant of anatomy!

TIM VANDERHOF wavered. He stood ten feet from a glass-paneled door, his apprehensive gaze riveted upon it, and swayed back and forth like a willow. Or, perhaps, an aspen. He wasn't sure. Yes, it was an aspen—a quaking aspen. His ears seemed to twitch gently as he listened to the low rumble of voices from the inner office of S. Horton Walker, president of The Svelte Shop, Fifth Avenue's snootiest establishment for supplying exclusive models of dresses, lingerie, and what-not.

Let us examine Mr. Vanderhof. He did not, at the moment, look like a man who, within a very short time, was going to turn into what amounted to something rather like a chameleon. Nevertheless, mentally and spiritually, Tim Vanderhof was a mere mass of quivering protoplasm, and no great wonder, after the interview he had just had. He wasn't bad looking, though

slightly pallid. His features were regular, his face a bit chubby, and his eyes held the expression of a startled fawn. They were brown, like his hair, and he had a pug nose.

He shivered slightly as the glass-paneled door opened. A Back appeared. Under it were two short, slightly bowed legs, and it was surmounted by a scarlet billiard-ball of a head. There was no neck. The Back was draped in tweeds, and a strong smell of tobacco, brandy, and horses emanated from it.

The Back extended a large, capable hand, clenched it into a fist, and shook it warningly at someone inside the office.

"Gad, sir!" a deep voice boomed, "Gad! This is the last straw! Mrs. Quester will be furious. And I warn you, Walker, that I shall be furious too. I have stood enough of your trifling. Twice already you promised exclusive models of a dress for my wife, and then failed to deliver."

"But—" said a Voice.

"Silence!" bellowed the Back, and the Voice was cowed. "You have promised Model Forty-Three to Mrs. Quester. If you dare to exhibit it at your fashion show this afternoon, I shall call upon you with a riding-whip. I shall be here after the show, and you will have the dress ready for me to take to Mrs. Quester. You have had enough time to make alterations. Gad, sir—in Burma I have had men broken—*utterly* broken—for less than this."

The Voice, with a faint spark of antagonism, rallied. It said, "But."

"But me no buts, damn your eyes! This isn't Burma, but you will find that Colonel Quester still knows how to use his fists—you *tradesman!* I shall be back this afternoon, and—*brrrrmph!*"

"Yes, Colonel," the Voice assented weakly, and the Back turned, revealing to the watching Vanderhof a round, crimson face with a bristling, iron-gray mustache, and beetling brows from beneath which lightning crackled menacingly. Brrmphing, Colonel Quester moved like a mastodon past the quaking Vanderhof and vanished through a door that seemed to open coweringly of its own accord at the man's advance. Vanderhof immediately turned and started to tiptoe away.

The Voice detected the sound of his departure. "Vanderhof!" it screamed. 'Come here!"

Thus summoned, the unfortunate official halted, retraced his steps, and entered the inner sanctum. There he paused like a hypnotized rabbit, watching the Voice, who was also known as S. Horton Walker, president of The Svelte Shop.

A HARD man, S. Horton Walker. As a child he had pulled the wings off butterflies, and maturity had not improved him. He looked like a shaved ape, with a bristling crop of blue-black hair and a gleaming, vicious eye that was now engaged in skinning Vanderhof.

"Ulp," the later remarked, in a conciliatory tone.

"Don't give me that," Walker growled, crouching behind his desk like the gorilla he resembled. "I told you to keep that so-and-so out of my office. Well?"

"I said you were out," Vanderhof explained. "I—I—"

"You—you—" Walker mocked, pointing a stubby sausage of a finger. "Bah! And, again, bah! What the hell are you, a man or a jellyfish?"

"A man," Vanderhof said hopefully.

Walker's grunt was profoundly skeptical. "You're a weakfish. A non-entity. By God, when I was your age I had twenty-nine men under me. By sheer force of personality I made myself what I am today. And I like men with drive—push—get-up-and-go."

Vanderhof, seeing an opportunity of escape, began to get-up-and-go, but relapsed at Walker's furious yelp. "Why, do you

realize that Colonel Quester would have punched me in the eye if I hadn't impressed him with my personality? He's an outrageous person."

"You did promise those exclusive models to his wife though."

"We get a better price elsewhere," Walker said, and pondered. "But Model Forty-Three will be ready for him when he calls this afternoon. A dangerous man, the colonel. Where was I? Oh, yes. "You're a fool, Vanderhof."

Vanderhof nodded and looked like a fool. Walker groaned in exasperation.

"Haven't you any personality at all? No, you haven't. You're a—a—a chameleon, that's what. I've noticed that before. When you're talking to a ditch-digger, you act like one yourself. When you're talking to a banker, you turn into a banker. You're a *mirror,* that's what!"

It was unfortunate that Vanderhof did not leave at that moment. After his interview with the excitable Colonel Quester, he was mere protoplasm, and somewhat too receptive to suggestion. It was, of course, true, that Vanderhof had little character of his own. He had lost it, after years of associating with the virulent Walker. He was a complete yes-man, and needed only a catalyst to complete a certain chemical reaction that was already taking place.

"You're a chameleon," Walker said, with emphasis, and his eyes bored into Vanderhof's.

It was at that precise moment that Mr. Tim Vanderhof turned into a chameleon.

Not physically, of course. The metamorphosis was far more subtle. Adept for years at assuming the traits of others, Vanderhof was rather shockingly receptive. Though all he did was to sit down in a chair opposite his boss.

Walker stared, frowned, and hesitated.

Vanderhof stared, frowned, and didn't say anything.

Walker lifted a large hand and pointed accusingly.

Vanderhof lifted a smaller hand and also pointed accusingly.

Walker flushed. So did Vanderhof. The president of The Svelte Shop rose like a behemoth from his chair and growled, "Are you mocking me?"

Then he stopped, amazed, because Vanderhof had risen and said exactly the same thing.

"You—you—you—" Walker's face was purple. Vanderhof guessed what was coming. With a mighty effort he asserted what little remained of his will-power.

"D-don't go on!" he pleaded frantically. "P-please—"

"You chameleon!" S. Horton Walker thundered.

"You chameleon!" Vanderhof thundered.

Such bare-faced, impudent mockery was unendurable. Walker quivered in every muscle. "You're fired!" he said. "What's that? What did you say? What do you mean, *I'm* fired? Stop imitating me, you stupid clown. Don't call me a stupid clown! *Nrrgh!"*

"—nrrgh!" Vanderhof finished, not quite realizing what was happening to him. Walker sat down weakly. He was shaken a little, but his natural malignancy was still undimmed. A natural snake, S. Horton Walker.

"I—"

"I—" said Vanderhof.

Walker bellowed, *"Shut up!"* And, so strong was his will, for the moment Vanderhof remained perfectly quiet.

"Are you going to get out?" he asked at length, in a low, deadly voice. "Damn it, stop mocking me! I'll have you thrown out! *What?* Have me thrown out of my own office?"

Goaded to insensate fury by the fact that Vanderhof was repeating perfectly everything he said and did — and, curiously

enough, at exactly the same time he said and did it—Walker stuck out his thumb to press a button on the desk. It collided with Vanderhof's thumb.

Walker sat back, palpitating, a mute Vesuvius. Obviously Vanderhof had gone mad. And yet—

"I wish you'd go and drown yourself," said the president, meaning every word. He was somewhat astonished when Tim Vanderhof quietly arose and left the office. He would have been even more surprised had he seen Vanderhof walk down 42nd Street to Times Square, and then board the Brighton Beach subway train bound for Coney Island. Somehow, it is doubtful whether Walker would have regretted the incident or recalled his words. He was evil to the core, and a hard man, as has been mentioned previously. He turned back to his preparations for the exclusive fashion show that afternoon, while the metamorphosed Tim Vanderhof hurried off to go and drown himself.

NOW Tim was really a nice guy. He shot a fair game of golf, had once made ten straight passes while shooting craps at a stag party, and was kind to dogs, blind men, and small children. He explained the latter eccentricity by stating that he had once been a small child himself, which was no doubt true enough. Under other circumstances, Mr. Vanderhof might have achieved a genuine personality of his own, but he had the misfortune always to be associated with rats like Walker. Self-made men invariably contend that *they* had to fight their way through obstacles, so they create new obstacles for those under them, probably with the best intentions in the world. The fact remains that Walker had provided the ultimate catalyst for Tim Vanderhof, who got off the subway at Coney Island—it had now, by some strange metamorphosis, been transformed into an elevated—and wandered along the boardwalk, peering contemplatively at the ocean.

It was large, gray, and wet. A great deal of H_2O, to put it scientifically. Vanderhof's mind was dulled; he found it difficult to think clearly, and he kept hearing Walker's command over and over again.

"—go and drown yourself. Go and drown yourself."

The sky was cloudy. It had been a hot day, one of those Turkish bath affairs which make Manhattan, in the summer, a suburb of hell, and so there were vast quantities of people at Coney. Large bulging women lumbered about shepherding brats, who fed voraciously on ice-cream, pickles, hokey-pokey, hot dogs, and similar juicy tidbits. Brawny young men and flimsy girls, hot and perspiring, tried to gulp down air quite as humid as in the city. Meanwhile, the Atlantic Ocean beckoned to Tim Vanderhof.

His eyes were glazed as he made a beeline for the nearest pier. In the back of his mind a little remnant of sanity shrieked warning, but Vanderhof could not obey. Stripped of the last remnant of personality and will-power, he walked on. . . .

"—go and drown yourself. Go and drown yourself."

Vanderhof made a mighty effort to break the spell, but it was useless. He walked on, his gaze riveted on the greasy slate-colored water at the end of the pier. Not a man, woman, or child among the crowd noticed him. He tried to call for help, but no sound came from his lips.

People were running. Rain began to splash down, first in droplets, then in ever-increasing torrents. The gray clouds were fulfilling their promise. People ran, with newspapers over their heads, to the nearest shelter.

Wavering on the edge of the pier, Vanderhof felt something pull him back. Magnetically he was made to retreat a few staggering steps, He turned. He started to

walk back along the wharf, then he was running with the rest of the crowd. No longer did he hear Walker's voice demanding suicide. In its place was an urgent whisper that said:

"Run! *Run!*"

Hundreds of men, women, and children were rushing to shelter. The effect of this mass hegira was too much for the human chameleon. A wave seemed to bear him along with the others. Vainly he tried to struggle against the impulse. No use, of course. Rain splashed in his face.

It was like running in a dream, without conscious volition. Lines of force seemed to drag him onward. Off the pier. On the boardwalk, and along it, in the midst of the crowd. As various members of the mob dived for shelter, poor Vanderhof was tossed about like a leaf in a gale. A group leaped into a hot-dog stand, and Vanderhof veered after them. Then a larger group came past, and he skittered in their wake, utterly helpless.

They entered Luna Park, and he perforce followed.

Somehow he was caught in the eddy, and found himself, limp and perspiring, in a penny arcade, almost deserted. A semblance of sanity came back to him. Gasping and drenched to the skin, Vanderhof cowered behind a "grind-box" labeled "Paris Night—For Men Only," and wondered what in hell was happening to him.

He tried to think. What had Walker said? A human chameleon. It seemed to have come true. Adept for years at assuming the traits of others, the ultimate transformation had taken place. Whenever he looked at anyone now, he assumed the traits of that person.

It was really far worse, only Vanderhof didn't realize it quite yet.

Logically, the only solution was to stay away from people. A man without personality is bound to reflect the personality of others. Vanderhof peeped out, looking glumly at a rotund little man with white whiskers who was standing at the entrance to the arcade, staring virtuously at nothing. A pleasant little man, he thought. He probably had not a worry in the world. Vanderhof wished he were that man.

HE WAS startled by the sound of footsteps, and even more startled when a veritable giantess of a woman smacked him over the head with her umbrella. The unfortunate Vanderhof reeled, seeing stars. He gasped, "W-w-wha—"

"Worm!" the Amazon boomed. "I told you not to enter this—this *peep-show!*" Her voice quivered with menace. Utterly at a loss, Vanderhof raised his hand to his stinging head, but it was entrapped halfway in what seemed to be a maze of dangling spaghetti. He investigated. It was a set of white whiskers, exactly like the man at whom he had been looking—only the whiskers were on Vanderhof's face!

The giantess had turned momentarily to wither the arcade with a glance, and Vanderhof caught sight of himself in a nearby mirror. It did not, however, much resemble Tim Vanderhof. What he saw was a rotund little man with white whiskers.

With an astonished shriek Vanderhof turned back to his normal self. The apparition in the mirror resumed its usual and familiar semblance. It was again Tim Vanderhof.

"Oh, my God," the man murmured faintly. "I'm dreaming."

"What?" The Amazon turned, her umbrella raised. Then her eyes dilated. How the devil had her husband managed to get out of sight so suddenly, leaving an utter stranger in place of himself? She didn't know. She stared balefully at Vanderhof, who shrank back, his eyes on the umbrella.

Just then the giantess caught sight of the fat little man at the arcade's entrance.

She turned, lumbering away. This time she disdained the use of the umbrella. Going, apparently, on a variation of the principle that fingers were made before forks, she lifted a ham-like hand and smote the fat little man athwart the ear. The beard rippled like a white banner as the wretched creature was hurled out into the rain.

He raised himself from the mud and dazedly contemplated his wife. She had never before struck him without good cause —what she considered good cause, anyway. If she was going to beat him on sudden, mad impulses, the future would be dark indeed, thought the fat little man.

He rose and ran rapidly away.

The giantess followed, crying threats.

Tim Vanderhof shuddered convulsively. He was going insane. Or else. . . . No, it was too ghastly. He couldn't be a jellyfish as well as a chameleon. He might, perhaps, assume the traits of somebody else, but he *couldn't* acquire their actual physical appearance as well!

"No," Vanderhof said urgently. "Please —*no!*"

Yet it was profoundly and disturbingly logical. He had looked at the fat little man, and had become the fat little man, white whiskers and all. The shock of seeing himself in the mirror had caused him to return to a more normal appearance. What would be the ultimate result? Would Tim Vanderhof fade into a shadow—a mere thing? Yipe.

Such was the cry that burst from Vanderhof's dry throat at the very prospect. He *couldn't* go about the world turning into everybody he met. And yet—chameleons did it, in so far as pigmentation went. A specialized animal like a man might go even further. The powers of the mind and the will were unplumbed. Vanderhof knew that, from much perusal of Sunday supplements and science-fiction magazines. Recalling stories he had read by such authors as H. G. Wells, Jules Verne, and Henry Kuttner, he groaned as he realized that the heroes of such tales usually met a sticky end.

"Oh, no!" Vanderhof whispered involuntarily. "I don't want to die. I'm too young to die."

Footsteps clumped into the arcade. Hurriedly Vanderhof whirled, burying his face in the nearest slot-machine, which featured a presumably authentic reel telling how native women were kidnapped by gorillas in the Congo. It was neither natural shyness nor a genuine interest in anthropology which caused Vanderhof's sudden retreat. He feared to face anyone, believing, logically enough, that he might turn into that person.

He dropped a penny in the slot and whirled the crank, scarcely seeing the faded cards that flickered into view and out again inside the machine. A gorilla was engaged in wandering through its native jungle.

SOMEONE behind Vanderhof began to laugh maniacally. His cries rose into shrill screams.

There were answering, inquiring shouts. Feet thudded. Someone called, "What's the matter there."

"A monkey!" came the hysterical response. "There's a gorilla looking at dirty pictures! I've got the jumping jitters again!"

Vanderhof hurriedly turned to face a tall, skinny man with a horselike face and bloodshot eyes. He carried a cane and apparently a large cargo of Scotch.

"It's coming after me!" the man screeched, retreating. "First snakes, and now this. Ah-h, those awful glaring eyes!"

"Sh-h!" said Vanderhof, lifting a placating hand. The drunk shivered in every limb.

"It hisses like a snake!" he cried, and thrust out the cane like a fencer. Its metal tip caught Vanderhof in the middle, and he doubled up, breathless and gasping.

And, simultaneously, he saw himself in a mirror.

It didn't look like Tim Vanderhof. It was wearing Tim Vanderhof's clothes, but it was, unquestionably a gorilla—the kind that kidnap native women in the Congo. The sound of footsteps grew louder. The new arrivals were almost at the arcade.

Vanderhof put forth a mighty effort of will, inadvertently baring his fangs. The drunk emitted a short, sharp cry and covered his eyes. But Vanderhof ignored him. He was glaring, wildly, at the mirror.

And, suddenly, the gorilla was gone. Vanderhof was himself again.

Tenderly rubbing his stomach, Vanderhof straightened to meet the red-rimmed gaze of the horse-faced man.

"Where is it?" the latter babbled. "Where did it go?"

"Where did what go?" Vanderhof asked coldly, still maintaining the mental effort that enabled him to keep his rightful form.

"The gorilla—" There was a pause as people poured into the arcade, asking questions. There was confusion and tumult. And shouting. This died, eventually, as Vanderhof indicated the horse-faced man and explained that he was drunk.

"I'm not that drunk," was the surly response. "Snakes, yes. But not gorillas. Where is it? I know." The man's glazed eyes brightened. "You hid it!"

"You're drunk," Vanderhof said.

"Yeah? For two cents I'd punch your face in. Gr-r!" His confusion crystallized into belligerency, the drunk rolled forward, waving the cane. Vanderhof fled—

It was a hard life, he thought dismally, as he slunk through Luna Park, carefully avoiding crowds. The rain had stopped now, but people were still wary. This was all to the good. Vanderhof could, he found, retain his normal shape by putting forth a strong mental effort, but this could not be kept up for long. Already he felt weak.

Yet, at the back of his mind, a queer, perverse excitement was slowly, imperceptibly growing. In a way, it was rather fun. Imagine being able to turn yourself into a gorilla! Everybody was afraid of gorillas!

People shot them, too, Vanderhof recalled, and shut his eyes. He wavered, hearing faintly the tones of a hoarse, rasping voice that plucked at his nerves. It was like—like—what?"

Like Walker's voice. Urgent—commanding. Demanding that he do something—

He opened his eyes and found himself before a side-show. The barker stood above him on a box, derby tilted back, checkered suit, garish, thrusting out a commanding finger.

"C'mon, folks! Here it is, greatest side-show on Earth! Tiniest dwarf ever born of woman, tallest giant since Creation, all the wonders of the Universe gathered here for your inspection. Step inside! You, there—only a dime! Step right forward, mister! The girl will take your dime!"

"No!" Vanderhof squeaked faintly, and tried to retreat. Instead, he found himself walking forward.

"Right this way, mister! Pay your dime! *R-r-right* in here! Step inside—"

Vanderhof found a dime and paid the admission charge. He didn't want to go into the side-show. He had a singularly horrid idea of what might happen there. But the barker's will-power was too strong for him, and he could no longer exert the mental effort that partially insulated him from danger. He was exhausted.

"I'm a jellyfish," poor Vanderhof mourned as he entered the show. "That's what I am. Walker was right. Oh, damn!" he ended futilely, tears of frustrated rage in his eyes. "I wish this would stop!"

But wishing didn't do any good. The chameleon man found himself in the side-show—surrounded by freaks!

He caught one glimpse of innumerable people—terrifying to him, under the circumstances—ranged around the big room, and then fled through a doorway on his right. It was definitely no time to face giants, dwarfs, dog-faced boys, or wild men from Sumatra. Vanderhof wanted only peace and quiet.

HE GOT neither.

He found himself in a small anteroom containing a mirror and a dwarf. The latter whirled and snapped. "Didn't you see the sign over the door? This is private! I-huh?"

He stopped talking, and presently resumed. "Say, that's a clever trick. Are you one of the boys? A magician, huh?"

"Yeah," said the now dwarfish Mr. Vanderhof. "I d-do it with mirrors."

"Damn good," returned the little man, whose name was Bingo. "Wait a minute. I want Ajax to see this."

"Don't bother," Vanderhof started, but he was too late. Bingo whistled, and immediately the room was darkened by the shadow of Ajax, who was seven feet nine inches tall, and would have had no need for snowshoes.

Vanderhof shut his eyes. He tried to assert his will-power, or what little remained of it, and was rewarded with pleased noises from giant and dwarf. "Clever!" said the latter. "Did you see that? He was little a minute ago. Now he isn't."

"That's right," the giant rumbled. "He looked like you, too, Bingo. Did you notice? Who are you, Mister?"

"I wish I knew," Vanderhof gasped, feeling lost and helpless. He dared not open his eyes. He was again in his normal semblance, but the very sight of either Ajax or Bingo might cause another metamorphosis.

"You!" a new voice broke in—one familiar to Vanderhof as that of the drunk in the arcade. "I been looking for you. I want to punch you in the snoot."

Vanderhof, feeling set-upon, almost had a mad impulse to sock the drunk, but habit prevailed. He took refuge in flight, or tried to. Unfortunately, he ran into the mirror, bumped his nose, and turned, opening his eyes.

He saw Ajax and Bingo.

The drunk lunged forward, lifting his cane. Then he halted, and a scream of stark terror burst from his throat.

"Yaaaah!" he shrieked. Apparently considering this an insufficient comment, he threw up his hands and added, *"Waaaah!"*

He fled, leaving a memento in the form of his cane, which he flung at Vanderhof with unerring aim. Nose and cane collided.

Ajax and Bingo whistled in chorus: "Wow!" said the latter. "Didja see that? Mister, you're good! You almost scared me."

Vanderhof, tears of pain in his eyes, turned to the mirror. "Yeah," he said in a shaky voice. "You may not believe it, but I'm scaring myself. Am I crazy, or do I look like both of you?"

"Well," the dwarf said judiciously, "the top part of you looks like me, but the bottom half looks like Ajax. *I* don't see how you do it. You must be on the big time."

Vanderhof was silent, considering the impossible reflection in the mirror. From the waist up he was Bingo, the dwarf. His lower extremities were those of a giant. The result was harrowing in the extreme. It was like putting a chameleon on Scotch plaid.

With a mighty effort he resumed his normal appearance. There were cries of amazement and appreciation from his companions. Leaving them to their simple pleasures, Vanderhof walked unsteadily back into the main show. He was bound for fresh air—lots of it. And peace.

Chameleons, however, do not lead peace-

ful lives, contrary to the opinions of some. The unexpected is always happening.

As Vanderhof crossed the big room, he was trying to understand what had happened. He had assumed the outward appearance of two people at the same time—abnormal people at that. Things were getting worse. Ajax and Bingo. Bingo and Ajax. Giant and—

Whup! Vanderhof had entered another room, over the doorway of which was a sign reading, "Magic Mirrors," and paused, facing the only normal mirror in the place. He was looking at the same conglomeration of dwarf and giant that he had viewed before.

Good Lord! Could he change his shape by merely—*thinking?* The thought was appalling, yet it possessed a curious, perverse fascination for Vanderhof. Standing perfectly motionless, he concentrated on his own normal self.

And there was the reflection of Tim Vanderhof facing him!

That, at least, was a relief. But, feeling slightly safer now, Vanderhof didn't stop. He wanted to make sure. He thought of the side-show barker outside, and visualized him mentally. Derby hat, cigar, checkered suit.

The reflection in the glass showed the barker, though there was neither derby, cigar, nor checkered suit. Apparently only Vanderhof himself could change. His clothing remained unaltered. That was natural enough.

He returned to his normal self.

"You!" said a familiar voice. "I been looking for you! None of your tricks, now! I wanna punch your nose."

"Oh, my goodness!" Vanderhof said, turning. "You again!"

"Yeah!" said the drunk belligerently. "Wanna make something out of it?" He lifted the cane and advanced. Vanderhof, perforce, retreated into the room of Magic Mirrors. He found himself being backed into a corner, his fascinated gaze riveted on the cane. Its metal tip looked extremely hard. The drunk had recovered it, or else acquired a new one. In any case, it seemed to be a dangerous weapon.

The horsey face bore a malignant expression. "I'm gonna *smash* you," it said, and thrust itself forward. Vanderhof backed away, feeling the cold surface of a mirror at his back. He was trapped. The room was empty. No use to call for help. The din from the next room, where a band was loudly playing, would drown any but the loudest shrieks.

ABRUPTLY Vanderhof felt irritation. His stomach was still sore from the cane's tip, and his nose, too, was aching. He said, "Go away."

"No," the drunk growled. "I'm gonna *smash* you."

Sudden, violent rage boiled up in Vanderhof. He thought of Ajax and Bingo. If they were there, they'd help him. But—

Vanderhof thought diligently, visualizing giant and dwarf. From the startled look that came over the drunk, he realized that the metamorphosis had once again taken place.

He stepped forward, warily at first, and the horse-faced man retreated.

At that precise moment Vanderhof caught sight of himself in one of the mirrors that lined the place. The change was not quite the same as before. This time, from the waist down, Vanderhof was Bingo, the dwarf. His upper portion resembled Ajax the giant.

Nor was that the worst. The mirror that reflected the insane image was no normal one. It was a distorting mirror, designed to cause laughter by warping and twisting images. Concave, it reflected Vanderhof not only as a half-giant, half-dwarf, but as a swooping arc—a being bent like a bow, such as had never before existed on Earth.

The drunk shrieked. "No, no!" he babbled. "Not that!"

Vanderhof realized that he had taken on the attributes of the distorted image. He glanced at the cowering horse-faced man, and felt a warm glow of triumph.

It faded as he was punched in the stomach by the cane.

Vanderhof got mad. He said, with slow emphasis, "Okay. You asked for it. Now you're going to—*get it!*"

The other showed his teeth.

Vanderhof looked at the nearest mirror. The result was shocking, but did not quite satisfy him. He looked at another, and then another, after that turning to confront his enemy.

Not even Samson could have faced the chaotic Vanderhof without screaming then. He looked like a piecemeal zombie assembled by someone with no knowledge of anatomy. One leg was six feet longer than the other. He had five arms. His chest was like a balloon, and his waist measured perhaps three inches around.

His head resembled a fried egg that had broken in the pan. The mouth was, oddly enough, in the forehead, and there was a tasty assortment of eyes scattered around them, all of these glaring furiously. He towered to the ceiling, and the horse-faced man, giving up all thought of hostility, skittered away like a rabbit.

"Go 'way!" he babbled. "Don't touch me! You're not human, that's what you ain't!"

"You don't get out of it that easily," Vanderhof snapped, barring the door with a fifteen-foot arm. "What do you think I am, anyhow?"

"The devil himself," said the drunk, with a flash of sudden insight. *"Aurrrgh!* Don't do that!"

"I'll do it again," Vanderhof announced, and a scream of pain from the drunk bore testimony to the fact that he had done it again. "Thus."

The wild and impassioned shrieks of the horse-faced man bore fruit. Vanderhof heard faint cries from behind him. He turned to see faces peering in through the door.

They went white and drew back. Someone cried, "A freak! He's gone mad!"

"He's murdering me!" the drunk announced. "Help!"

Heartened by reinforcements, he made the mistake of prodding Vanderhof from the rear with his cane. At this all semblance of sanity departed from Tim Vanderhof. Completely forgetting everything else, he bent all his energies to the task of reducing the horse-faced man to a state of babbling idiocy.

"Give me that cane!" he grated.

"So you can ram it down my throat?" came the prescient reply. "I won't."

At this Vanderhof looked in a mirror, sprouted another arm, grew two feet, and advanced toward his opponent. He got the cane and broke it into six pieces. One in each hand, he commenced to tattoo a rhythm on the drunk.

This wasn't quite satisfactory, so he gave it up, and concentrated on scaring the wretched man to death. Never was any revenge more horrifying or complete. Vanderhof felt a random sense of warning; it might be wiser, safer, to leave now, before more trouble arrived. But—what the hell!

He grinned, and the horse-faced man bellowed in anguish. "He's going to eat me!" he cried. "Don't let him eat me!"

"There they are," someone observed. "In there, Sergeant. It's a freak. Quite mad."

"It's a freak, all right," said a gruff voice. "But I'm thinking that I'm the looney one. Will you look at the horrid thing!"

"I've been looking at it for ten minutes," said the other voice. "Ever since I turned in the alarm. You've got your

squad with you. Arrest him before he kills that man."

Vanderhof turned. The doorway held a burly, grizzled oldster in police uniform, and behind him a group of plainclothes men, their profession easily established by a glance at their feet. There were guns.

HE WAS sent staggering. The horse-faced man had made a break for freedom. Vanderhof, boiling with rage, plunged in pursuit. There was chaos on the threshold; then Vanderhof was past, and racing after his victim.

A bullet whistled past his ear.

Oh-oh! This altered matters. Vanderhof, hidden momentarily behind the bandstand, paused, looking around. He saw no one —the horse-faced man had vanished—but heard voices.

"He went behind there—get him—guns ready, men!"

Vanderhof thought hard. He visualized the drunk. And, instantly, he assumed the appearance of the drunk.

He ran out from behind the bandstand, almost colliding with the sergeant and a plainclothes man with him.

"Hey—"

"He went that way!" Vanderhof cried. "After him! Don't let him get away!"

Without waiting for an answer, he ran for the exit. There was startled silence, and then the sergeant and his crew raced in pursuit.

Vanderhof leaped out into the open air, flattened himself against the wall of the building, and concentrated on the face of the plainclothes man who had accompanied the sergeant. And, of course, the inevitable happened.

The sergeant appeared. He cast a swift glance at Vanderhof.

"Where is he, Clancy?" he bellowed. "Which way did he go?"

"There!" said the pseudo-Clancy, and pointed. He was borne away in a mob of detectives who gushed out of the exit. All of them were busily searching for a freak with six arms and an impossible head—a freak who no longer existed!

Ten minutes later Vanderhof, in his normal guise, was on the train bound back for Manhattan. It had been easy to drift away from the detectives, who naturally suspected nothing. And, after that, Vanderhof wanted only to get away from Coney Island. His nerves were in bad shape. He needed a rest.

So, illogically enough, he went back to New York.

He was still angry about the horse-faced man. He would have dearly loved to have taken another poke at the guy. But the police had interrupted. Vanderhof's resentment wandered, and finally focused on a man with bristling blue-black hair and a vicious gleam in his eyes. The guy looked uncommonly like S. Horton Walker, president of The Svelte Shop.

Walker—nuts to Walker, Vanderhof thought. "Fire me, will he?" the chameleon man brooded. "Just on account of Colonel Quester! Tchah!" The fashion show would be going on soon, he remembered. And, simultaneously with the thought, Vanderhof grinned.

A singularly malicious and unpleasant grin. . . .

"Fire me, will he?" he asked rhetorically, turning into Ajax for a brief moment. "I'll fix him!"

While making his way toward the Fifth Avenue store, he pondered. He was achieving some sort of mastery over his chameleon-like changes. If he visualized a person, he could become that person—though his clothing never altered. And, with an effort of will, he could resume his normal form. Good enough. What now?

The fashion show was in full swing when Vanderhof slipped quietly into The Svelte Shop, unobtrusively making his way behind the scenes. Dowagers and damsels

in tons of jewelry were sitting about, feeding on canapes and *hors d'oeuvres,* while all sorts and conditions of men waited uneasily upon their respective daughters, wives, and lady friends. Park Avenue had turned out in force for the initial showing of exclusive gowns by The Svelte Shop. Mannequins were gliding along the runways, and over all presided the figure of S. Horton Walker, resplendent in specially-tailored garments, and looking more than ever like a shaved ape.

"And Model Twelve?" a slightly decayed socialite inquired from above her tiers of chins. "The exclusive Model Twelve, Mr. Walker?"

"Soon," said Walker, rubbing his hands. "Very soon, Mrs. Smythe-Kennicott-Smythe."

PEERING through drapes of wine-colored fabric, Vanderhof sucked in his lower lip. Model Twelve was already famous.

It was super-exclusive. Only one gown on this model had been created. And, when it showed, the bidding would be high—almost like an auction, though, of course, most genteel. Mrs. Smythe-Kennicott-Smythe would probably get it. She was the wealthiest woman in New York, and cream on the elite's upper crust, to put it mildly.

"Nuts to you, Mr. Walker," Vanderhof said silently, and fled. He made his way to the dressing-rooms, pausing at sight of Susan Vail, the shop's loveliest model. The girl nodded, smiled, and went on her way.

Vanderhof visualized her. Suddenly he was gone. A perfect duplicate of Susan Vail stood in the passage, looking rather odd in Tim Vanderhof's garments.

"Now for Model Twelve. It was carefully stored away, but Vanderhof knew where to look. Tenderly, almost reverently, he drew it from its hiding-place, and held up the gown. It was a gorgeous creation — one that would transform any woman.

"Why, Susan," a soft voice said, "what are you doing in those clothes?"

Vanderhof turned hurriedly, to confront a small brown-haired model with wide eyes. "I—"

"And what's the matter with your voice? Got a cold?"

"No," said Vanderhof shrilly. "It—it's just a gag." Seizing Model Twelve, he fled into the nearest dressing-room.

A few minutes later he came out, wearing the gown. Since he looked exactly like Susan Vail, it wasn't at all unbecoming. But his plans weren't finished yet. He wanted to perform an experiment.

He entered a room replete with tall mirrors, reflecting him from various angles. And he concentrated. If he could become two men at once, surely he could transform himself into two or more Susan Vails.

The results were beyond all expectations. From every angle Susan Vails materialized. They appeared like rabbits out of a hat. And all of them wore Model Twelve.

Meanwhile, Walker was preening himself as he made the announcement for which everyone was waiting.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen, the event of the afternoon. At great expense, we have secured an ultra-exclusive model—a veritable symphony. There is only one like it in the world."

"How do we know that?" asked a skeptical man with sideburns.

Walker turned a hurt stare upon him. "The Svelte Shop stands ready to guarantee my statement. Our integrity has never been questioned. And now—Model Twelve!"

He flung out an arm toward the runway. The curtains shook convulsively. Through them appeared Susan Vail. A soft gasp went up from the women at sight of Model Twelve.

Then another gasp went up. Another Susan Vail had slipped through the curtains and was following in the track of the first. She, too, wore Model Twelve.

"Hey—" said the skeptical man with sideburns.

He stopped. A third Model Twelve was coming.

Then another. And another!

"My God!" the skeptical man gasped. "Quintuplets!"

Walker had turned a delicate shade of mauve. Cries of outraged fury went up from the audience. "Exclusive model," somebody snapped. "Hah!"

Meanwhile the army of Model Twelves was marching steadily through the curtains. The room was filled with them. Walker was clawing at his hair and making gurgling sounds. Mrs. Smythe-Kennicott-Smythe arose, waggled her chins haughtily, and departed.

"One might as well shop in the five-and-ten," she observed.

"It's sabotage!" Walker whispered faintly. "B-boring from within—"

His eyes brightened a trifle. Mrs. Smythe-Kennicott-Smythe had reconsidered. She wasn't leaving, after all. She was returning, her eyes very wide, and behind her was a large, bulky man with a mask on his face.

Other men arrived. Five of them. And they had guns, and were masked.

"This," said the leader, "is a stick-up. Squat, beetle-puss." He pushed Mrs. Smythe-Kennicott-Smythe into a chair. "And keep your trap shut. That goes for all of you." He waved a gleaming automatic. "Cover the exits, boys."

The boys obeyed. The guests sat, frozen with horror. One dowager attempted to swallow her diamonds, but was dissuaded. Walker gasped for air.

"This will ruin me!" he squawked. "My customers—my clients, I mean—"

"Shaddap," remarked the big man. "Or I'll let you have it. Don't anybody move. Frisk 'em, boys."

One of the boys produced a canvas bag and made the rounds, collecting whatever jewelry and money he could unearth. A pearl necklace, the existence of which had heretofore gone unsuspected, was revealed when Mrs. Smythe-Kennicott-Smythe was compelled to stare ceiling-ward.

"Hey!" said one of the boys. "What the hell—what—*ulp!*"

"Look!" he finished. "Jeez, boos—look!"

The big man looked. He, too, stared. Model Twelve was in action.

THERE were about twenty Susan Vails lined up on the runway. The last of them had stepped forward and—*merged*—with the one in front of her. This, Vanderhof had found, was the only way of consolidating his various images. He merely had to walk into himself.

The nineteenth Susan Vail merged with the eighteenth. And the eighteenth stepped forward—

Nobody else moved.

There was a stricken silence as the fifteenth Susan Vail became the fourteenth—and so on—the third became the second; there was only one Susan Vail now.

She hurried toward the exit.

But now the stasis broke. One of the thugs barred her path, lifting his gun menacingly.

Susan Vail—or Vanderhof—veered aside, toward an ante-room lined with mirrors. She ducked into it and slid the curtain in place after her.

The leader snapped, "Get her, Phil."

Phil said reluctantly, "There ain't no way for her to get outa there."

"I said—"

"Okay," Phil placated. "Just gimme time. That dame ain't normal."

He moved forward, gun lifted. His hand touched the curtain. Then he turned.

"Boss, there ain't nothing in there but a lot of mirrors. What's the use—"

"You heard me!" the boss yelped.

"Okay," said Phil, and yanked the curtain aside.

Apparently there *was* another way out of the ante-room, for Susan Vail wasn't there any more. Instead, there were fifteen men, and they all looked exactly like Tim Vanderhof. Oddly enough, they all wore Model Twelve.

"Yaah!" said Phil shrilly, staggering back.

Two Tim Vanderhofs sprang upon him. One struck the gun from his hand, while the other planted a hard fist on Phil's jaw. The thug folded up limply.

One Vanderhof had pulled the curtain back into place, but Vanderhofs were emerging through it in twos, threes, and dozens. The room was suddenly flooded with Vanderhofs, all wearing Model Twelve. It was as though the ante-room had suddenly decided to give birth. It erupted Vanderhofs. It spewed them forth, and as fast as they emerged new ones followed. For there were many mirrors in that little room.

THE element of surprise was in Vanderhof's favor. The crooks were struck dumb by this insane manifestation of men in evening gowns. Before they could recover, each one found himself borne down under a tangle of slugging, punching, kicking, homicidally-active Vanderhofs.

Mrs. Smythe-Kennicott-Smythe threw up her hands in hol- horror. A Vanderhof paused to chuck her under the chins. "Keep your shirt on, babe," he advised. "I'll get your jewels back."

The lady fainted.

Not all the Vanderhofs were engaged in taking care of the crooks. Twenty of them had mounted the runway and were delicately parading, showing off Model Twelve, which, to say the least, looked rather startling on Tim Vanderhof's masculine figure. A half-dozen more had surrounded the pallid, paralyzed Walker and were engaged in making horrific faces at him. Another group of Vanderhofs were holding an impromptu jam session in a corner, while still another had recaptured the canvas bag and was strewing its contents around the room, shouting, "Pig pig pig pig" in a hoarse voice. The clients were on hands and knees, scrambling after their stolen property.

It was a scene of utter chaos.

And Tim Vanderhof was—or were—having a glorious time. He hadn't enjoyed himself so much in years. He was doing a dozen different things, all at the same time, and the most delightful one of all dealt with the thugs, who by this time were trying only to escape from the veritable army that was assailing them.

Someone cried, "The police!"

That brought Vanderhof back to sanity. He hurriedly knocked out the thugs —not a difficult task, since they were already nearly smothered by sheer weight of numbers—and then fled in a body, leaving confusion in his wake.

When the police arrived, they found six unconscious gangsters and a horde of socialites on hands and knees, squabbling over the division of their property. Walker was counting his fingers, with a vague air of skeptical disbelief. And there was no sign of a Vanderhof.

Indeed, there was only one Vanderhof by that time. The process of assimilation had again taken place, and the resultant single Vanderhof had removed Model Twelve—now torn into shreds—and resumed his own clothing. He didn't wait for events to happen, though. He took them into his own hands.

The elevator lifted him fifteen stories above Fifth Avenue, letting him out at the private office of Enoch Throckmorton, the actual owner of The Svelte Shop, as well

as a number of other enterprises. Vanderhof had never seen Throckmorton; there were vague rumors of his existence on some Olympian height. Walker sometimes visited the man, and even dined with him on occasion. Now, leaving the elevator, Vanderhof thought of Walker, and visualized the man, blue-black hair, flashing eyes, and apish face.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Walker," said the receptionist. "Go right in."

Vanderhof nodded and opened a door, facing a glass-brick desk about a mile long. Behind it sat a shriveled little fellow who was chewing a cigar.

This was Enoch Throckmorton.

Or, better yet: This was—*Enoch Throckmorton!*

"Ha," said Throckmorton in a cracked voice, "sit down, Walker. I've just been getting a telephone call from downstairs. Quite a little fuss, eh?"

"Nothing much," Vanderhof shrugged, grinning to himself. Apparently his resemblance to Walker was so complete that even Throckmorton was deceived.

"Nothing much! Indeed! This man Vanderhof deserves recognition! He captured those bandits himself—we'd have had to make good on every cent stolen if he hadn't. I still don't know how he did it, but—he did it. That's the important thing."

"Well," Vanderhof said, "I've been intending to talk to you about Vanderhof for some time. He's the smartest man we have. Candidly, I think he deserves promotion."

"Very well. What have you in mind?"

"Manager. At a corresponding salary."

Throckmorton said slowly, "You know, of course, that the manager of The Svelte Shop is responsible only to me. You will have no authority over Vanderhof if—"

"I know my limitations," Vanderhof shrugged. "Vanderhof needs no discipline."

"Very well," said Throckmorton, pressing a button. "I'll attend to it immediately."

"Uh—" Vanderhof stood up. "By the way—if I should change my mind—"

Steel glinted in Throckmorton's beady eyes. "Indeed! You should have thought of that before. Do you, or do you not, recommend Vanderhof's promotion."

"I do."

"Then he's promoted. And the matter is now out of your hands—entirely!"

Vanderhof smiled and turned. He walked out on clouds. He did not even know that the elevator was taking him downstairs. Nuts to Walker. . . .

So engrossed was he in day-dreams that he forgot to resume his normal appearance by the time he reached the general offices —which was, save for one person, deserted. This person wore tweeds, and now turned a round, crimson face and a bristling mustache on Vanderhof. It was Colonel Quester.

"Hah!" the colonel bellowed gently. "There you are! I see you've kept me waiting again."

"Uh—"

"Silence!" said Colonel Quester, and the ceiling shook. "I have come for Model Forty-three. Mrs. Quester's still furious, but the gown will placate her, I am sure. Is it ready? It had better be."

"Yes," said Vanderhof faintly. "I—I'll get it."

He fled. He got Model Forty-three. And, looking into a nearby mirror, he saw that he still exactly resembled S. Horton Walker.

Carrying the gown over his arm, on the way back he met one of the models. "Why, there you are, Mr. Walker," the girl said. "I thought you were in your office."

"I—uh—just stepped out for a minute."

So Walker was in his office! Vanderhof started to grin. He was beaming like

a Cheshire cat when he entered the room where Colonel Quester waited, rumbling faintly like a miniature Vesuvius.

But the colonel softened at sight of the dress. "Ha!" he remarked. "A beauty! It is exclusive, you say?"

Vanderhof stepped back a pace. "The only one in existence," he remarked. "How do you like it, bottle-nose?"

THERE was a dead silence. Colonel Quester breathed through his nose. At last he asked, in a quiet voice, "What did you say?"

"Bottle-nose was the term," said Vanderhof happily. "Also, now that I think of it, you rather resemble a wart-hog."

"*Brrrmph!*" Quester rumbled warningly.

"*Brrrmph* to you," said Vanderhof. "You rhinocerous. So you want Model Forty-three, do you, fathead? Well, look."

He held up Model Forty-three, and with a strong tug ripped the dress from top to bottom.

Quester turned magenta.

Vanderhof ripped the dress again.

Quester turned blue.

Vanderhof finished the job by ripping Model Forty-three into ribbons and throwing it into the colonel's face. Then he waited.

Colonel Quester was having difficulty in breathing. His mighty fists were clenched. "Wait," he promised. "Just wait till I control my blood-pressure. I'll break you for this—"

He took a step forward, and simultaneously Vanderhof dived for the inner office. He slipped through the door, held it shut behind him, and saw before him the blue-black thatch of S. Horton Walker, who was looking down at some papers on his desk.

Vanderhof asserted his will-power. Instantly he changed his shape.

Walker looked up. "Vanderhof?" he snapped. "I want to talk to you—"

"Just a minute. You have a caller."

"Wait!"

Vanderhof didn't wait. He stepped out of the office, carefully closing the door, and turned to confront Colonel Quester.

"Ah," he said. "What can I do for you, Colonel?"

"Get out of my way," said Quester, in a low, impassioned voice.

"With pleasure," Vanderhof smiled, stepping aside. "If you're looking for Mr. Walker, he's right inside."

To this the colonel made no answer. He entered the inner office, and Vanderhof gently shut the door after him. There was a brief silence.

It was broken by a dull thud, and a short, sharp cry, mingled with a bellow of triumph. Other noises followed.

"Model Forty-three, hey?" a hoarse voice boomed. "By Gad, sir, you'll eat it!"

"Ah?" Vanderhof murmured, walking away. "That lace collar should make a tasty mouthful."

He dusted his hands delicately. He was thinking that he had managed to acquire a personality of his own, and that his weird power of metamorphosis would gradually fade and vanish of its own accord. He was no longer a jellyfish—a chameleon.

He was the manager of The Svelte Shop. A choked gurgle of stark anguish came faintly from the distance.

Tim Vanderhof lifted his eyebrows. "Heigh-ho," he observed. "It's five o'clock. Another day."

THE SHAPE OF THRILLS TO COME

ANOTHER LOVECRAFT THRILLER CLASSIC

FOR your next issue is scheduled yet another Lovecraft masterpiece—a saga of unutterable horror and unimagined dread! It is a full-length novelette that holds your interest all the way through, as it builds slowly—but with terrible sureness—to its ghastly climax! And this novelette, titled

THE SHADOW OVER INNSMOUTH

has never before seen magazine publication.

What monstrousness overshadows the decayed seaport town of Innsmouth—a town which all normal folks shun like a plague? What gruesome bargain can have been made by the ancestors of Innsmouth's inhabitants? For these people, strangely fishlike in appearance, never die; they merely DISAPPEAR. . . . And it is whispered that, at the last, they go down into the sea—and there fulfill their ancient pact with Dagon, bestial fish-god of drowned Atlantis!

Be certain that you do not miss this novelette—a drama positively brimming over with menacing suspense—by the great Howard Phillips Lovecraft!

IN complete contrast is

WHO CAN ESCAPE. . . .

. . . a novelette by Seabury Quinn. It is the tale of a man whose soul is on the rack all the days of his life—and who passes, tortured, into eternity. For he had married for money; and it is a Western saying that he who marries for money must pay. Judson Talley pays—every penny of the cost to the withered phantom of his elderly, revengeful wife!

An Eastern saying, an Arab proverb, asks, "Who can escape what is written on his brow from the beginning?" And Judson Talley did not escape. . . .

Yet—murderer though he is!—you will feel great sympathy for this man.

Ushering in a new year of WEIRD TALES, the January issue carries a fine sifting of tales by your most favored authors. They are stories chosen with the utmost care, to give you the ultimate in balance and variety.

Your JANUARY Number of WEIRD TALES Goes on Sale November 1st.

Compliments of Spectro

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

Wreaking vengeance on rich and poor, high and low alike—for any kind of crime—SPECTRO didn't altogether leave his author out of this revengeful scheme of things . . .

MR. BERTON ASWELL was an author of promise. He was more than that—he was a best-seller, and the only difference between him and a peacock, figuratively speaking, was that he had no fan to spread. He did very well without it, thanks to Spectro.

Spectro was Aswell's magic man, his brain-child, his own creature whose daring exploits had so seized the public fancy that the announcement of Spectro's latest adventure put down between covers by Mr. Berton Aswell was awaited breathlessly. Spectro was one of those popular avenging heroes of fiction, a hybrid who sprang full-bodied from the fertile brain of Berton Aswell by way of Saint Simon Templar, the Four Just Men, and Dr. Fu Manchu; he had vanquished everything from international spies and madmen to world colossi. There was nothing shy or uncertain about Spectro, a quality which held for his creator, also, though it was undeniable that people meeting Berton Aswell for the first time were always unpleasantly surprised at the realization that this little, spindle-legged man with the pale blue, liquescent eyes and the incipient mustache no more prominent than his straggling hair had given birth to the magnificent Spectro.

As an avenger Spectro was undoubtedly superb, moving from adventure to adventure as rapidly as Aswell's checks came in, Aswell being one of those writers who—the despair of their lesser, slower brethren—are able to produce at a great rate: a novel a weekend, thanks to three secretaries and a dictaphone. Spectro wreaked vengeance upon high and low for any kind of crime, and his impish signature—*Compliments of Spectro*—was as widely known as the swastika; whether it came with the return of stolen booty or with the corpse of some wicked criminal with whom Spectro had to deal in the absence of the official purveyors of justice, there it was, bold as brass, his signature, written in a little circle as precise as an imprinted trade mark.

As for Berton Aswell: he revelled in it all. The success of Spectro gave him so much confidence that he soon went from belittling Sherlock Holmes to casting dubious reflections on the literary worth of H. G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw, both of whom were among the chosen few who were blissfully unconscious of the existence either of Berton Aswell or Spectro, that glorified avenger who was the product of that little man. A psychologist might have called it a compensatory device, but Aswell always liked to imagine that at thought of him the entire underworld trembled and quaked for fear such a creature as Spectro might actually be loosed upon them.

SPECTRO, of course, was everything Aswell was not. He was tall, well-built, and handsome; he was direct, forceful, and forthright; he was modest, courageous, and resolutely honest; finally, he had a pixyish sense of humor. Aswell, unfortunately, whatever the merit of his creative processes, was devious, vain, and not quite honest;

With one bound, the caped figure leaped through the window — a magnificent long leap in SPECTRO'S best manner!

moreover, his sense of humor was warped. An ability to laugh at himself might have been his saving grace; he could have joined the chorus instead of raging at the critics who deprecated Spectro's adventures and cast aspersions on Aswell to such an extent that he took to caricaturing them in revenge, and had Spectro deal with them. That he should have derived so much satisfaction from this was clearly not to his credit.

In any case, that was Berton Aswell, and, instead of bettering himself, he grew immeasurably more vain and pompous with each new success. He had got Spectro up to the phenomenal sale of some forty thousand copies, when, in the language of his own books, he lifted a gambit. As in the case of all successful authors, he was plagued eternally by young hopefuls, who sent him their manuscripts, and in particular, Aswell was bothered by a promising writer with the absurd name of Gabriel Weedle. Aswell had met him once and remembered him as a thin, stringy young man with goggle-like spectacles, pale and unwholesome looking. But even Aswell, with all his pretensions, could not deny

that Weedle had talent and when, one morning, a manuscript showed up in something like Aswell's manner, with a gambit which seemed to Aswell extraordinarily clever, Aswell assumed that this was another unsaleable script, and used the gambit, with appropriate changes, of course, in one of Spectro's adventures.

Unfortunately, Weedle's story was published shortly after Spectro's latest adventure (which might have been called the adventure of the Weedle gambit) went on sale, and there was a great hullabaloo, the air was filled with charges, countercharges, horrid cries of *plagiarism,* and a nasty, if successful bit of squirming by Berton Aswell, cloaked in sanctimonious hypocrisy. A jury of their peers decided that Berton Aswell, as a successful novelist, would never have had to stoop so low as to plagiarize, and that Gabriel Weedle, as the envious would-be author, had undoubtedly done his potential benefactor a bad turn. Aswell was satisfied, and assuaged his conscience by promising himself that he would do something for Weedle some day. However, at this culmination of all his efforts, poor Weedle leaped off Westminister Bridge into the Thames; so the best Aswell could do was to send a wreath, which was adequately publicized as a "magnanimous gesture by the well-known author, creator of Spectro."

On the morning after the day when Gabriel Weedle was returned to that earth from which he and his high hopes had sprung, Berton Aswell came downstairs ready to take up the latest of Spectro's adventures where he had left off, and in his usual manner, he sat for a few moments playing his most recent dictation back to him, listening, in short, to his favorite music: his own voice in the process of fattening his bank account. The international bankers of his new novel were ready for Spectro's attention, and it was almost time for Spectro to send them his first warning, for, in the classic manner of some of his imitated predecessors, Spectro was the perfect gentleman avenger in that he decorously warned his victims three times before striking. Aswell particularly liked to compose Spectro's notes; they were clever, sometimes wickedly clever, and Berton Aswell could imagine people reading them in book form and saying to themselves: "Oh, that Berton Aswell must have a wit like a rapier thrust!" It was a warm, comforting thought.

So he sat and listened, lulled to new heights of conceit. "As for the almost obscenely fat Paulo Donato, Director of the Board, Spectro decided that his case was especially designed for his best efforts," he heard. "So he constructed an elaborate plan. In the morning he would put it into effect. For the time being, he could afford to wait, to sleep the sleep of the just." This was the point at which Aswell had stopped dictating the previous night, and, naturally, he expected the record to stop. Singularly enough, it did not. It went on to say in a crisp, deadly, and very familiar voice: "Who robs of money can repay; but he who takes a man's good name can never wheedle mercy from the Gods. Atone for Gabriel Weedle!"

THAT was all. It would have been enough for any ordinary author, but not for Berton Aswell. He put two and two together and avoided the obvious number; clearly someone, well acquainted with his work, and suspicious of the recent litigation—possibly a friend of Weedle's—had somehow got into his study and added these lines to his script in an effort to frighten him. Though possessed of no great courage, Aswell was cloaked and armored with enough conceit and success to give him a certain false bravado. He assumed that the identity of his nocturnal visitor could be determined easily enough, if he took the time to do so; obviously, he

could not call in Scotland Yard without facing questions that might be embarrassing. Nevertheless, he was briefly troubled by the familiarity of that voice. Even allowing for natural differences brought about by the mechanism of recording, he knew that voice, it was as familiar as his own, and he had certainly spent enough time in the past few years listening to his own voice to preclude error.

He summoned his secretary and played the record to her, cautioning her to pay special attention to the last two sentences.

"There," he said, when it was finished. "Did you ever hear that voice before?"

She said she thought not, but admitted that it had a familiar ring. "I ought to know it," she said. "But I just can't place it."

That was enough for Aswell. He dismissed his secretary and settled down to get to work, convinced that someone had played a not very nice joke on him. He began to construct within his mind's eye Spectro's room; it was dawn; Spectro would be awakening; now he would be swinging out of bed. He saw Spectro very clearly, and was preparing to travel swiftly ahead in his creative process, getting Spectro into his clothes, dictating the while, when an extraordinary thing happened. Spectro seemed to look squarely at him and said, "Get on with it. I'm waiting, and so is Mrs. Weedle."

Aswell thought for a moment that this hallucination was the result of his conscience pricking him, coupled with his natural disturbance at the strange incident of the previous cylinder; he hesitated briefly and went on. Thereafter, Spectro behaved as any properly created character should behave under the guidance of its creator—spending the next two hours rescuing a beauteous damsel, frightening into apoplexy one of the crooked crew of international bankers trying to precipitate a war on what Aswell estimated would be approximately page two-hundred-fifty, and so forth ad nauseam. At the end of this period, Aswell played his dictation back to him, and there, just where Spectro sat on the edge of his bed, he heard. "Get on with it. I'm waiting, and so is Mrs. Weedle." He was positive he had not spoken those words, and yet, there they were.

He left his work and went out for a long walk, but he was no more free of the problem of who had spoken into his dictaphone outside than he had been in his study. Naturally enough, he began to think of Mrs. Weedle; he had conveniently forgotten about her. But that there was a Mrs. Weedle, he remembered quite well from the trial. She had been there, a pathetic, woe-begone creature, as seedy as her husband. Ah, well, he thought, God helps those who help themselves!

It was a thought unworthy of the creator of Spectro, and when he got home, he had his just deserts. The metallic, crisp voice had not vanished from the cylinders, as Aswell had half hoped it might, and, to make matters worse, a second warning had been added. "Two days are allowed."

ASWELL exploded. He had a magnificent temper for so small a man, and like everything else obnoxious about him, it had grown in direct ratio to his success. He ranted and carried on and interrogated the servants for half an hour, demanding to know who had invaded his study and used his dictograph. It took the combined staff and his secretary to convince him that no one had entered the room since he had left it, and he had to examine the heavy windows himself before he could be sure.

At last, however, he was shaken. A good sign, but of no great moment in one so mercurial in temperament as Berton Aswell. Two warnings he had had. He began to think that someone meant business. That had a nasty sound. He sat down and

considered what he ought to do, and presently decided to call on his solicitors.

TO THEM he narrated as much of the matter as he thought he might safely tell.

They reassured him and sent him on his way. After he had gone, one of them turned to the other and said, "Poor Aswell's been working too hard. I saw it coming."

Aswell went on to see his doctor. After all, there was nothing quite so definite as the opinion of a medical man.

Dr. Philbrick made several routine tests and said that Aswell was physically very sound. Nevertheless, he was aware that something troubled him, and sought to probe his patient. Little by little, the safe part of the story came out.

"It has occurred to me," said Aswell at last, "that I'm like a man haunted by the creation of his mind." He gave a false laugh. "It's just as if Spectro were after me, isn't it! Two warnings. But he always gives a third."

"Of course," said the doctor happily. "That's obviously it. You've been overworking, and that sort of thing would naturally take place. You've been working so hard with Spectro that in his little way he's come to life."

Aswell laughed brittlely. "So that it amounts to my actually being haunted by my own character, eh?"

"I'm afraid it does. But it's nothing to be alarmed about. Rest is what you need, just rest. You can afford to take it."

"Very well. I will."

He went home full of resolve and quite renewed in self-confidence.

It was unfortunate that he forgot his determination so far as to enter the study the next morning and hear the dictograph tell him: "This is your last warning. Spectro never fails!"

There was no reason, thought Aswell, to be obtuse about a thing like this. Quite clearly someone bore him malice. It was possible that someone on the staff was responsible, but there was obviously no quick way to find out. He thought he had better, after all, settle with Mrs. Gabriel Weedle.

He could very well have sat down and written out a check for ten thousand pounds, but there was a certain parsimony in his nature which would simply not permit such a simple solution.

He went down to his solicitors and had them draw up a new will. It contained only one change; whereas in his old will all his money had been left to archeological research, since Aswell was unmarried and childless, in this one, he willed everything but bequests to his secretary and the servants to Mrs. Gabriel Weedle, reflecting gallantly that if that lady starved in the interval between now and the time she might benefit from his magnanimity on his part, he could at least feel comforted in the thought that he had done his part.

So he went blissfully back to his study and set to work once more, a little annoyed and fretful, as all self-important people are when things do not go precisely as they wish them to. In this case, Aswell's immediate trouble was the irrational acting of Spectro, as he visualized him in his mind's eye; instead of readying himself to take off after the scoundrels of Aswell's creation, Spectro carried on as if he were bent on some matter of personal vengeance in which Aswell had, at least, no conscious part. Try as he would, he could not put Spectro to work; he had got completely out of hand, which was an affront to Aswell's ego.

In the middle of his dictation, Aswell heard a tapping at the window. Since he paid no attention to it at first, it was repeated, more peremptorily this time. Leaving his dictaphone running, he got up and went over. He saw no one but a caped gentleman not far away, a figure who

looked extremely familiar. Curiously, he threw up the heavy window and peered out.

At this moment several singular events took place. With one bound, the caped figure seemed to have turned and leaped into the window—a magnificent long leap, in Spectro's best manner. Almost simultaneously, the heavy window came crashing down squarely on Berton Aswell's neck; quite possibly, Aswell never knew what hit him. In any event, his neck was broken, and he was dead when his secretary entered the study an hour later.

"Death by accident," said the coroner's jury gravely. "Not a doubt of it."

Mrs. Gabriel Weedle, who had scraped and saved for years, was thoroughly bewildered to be so wealthy, poor woman.

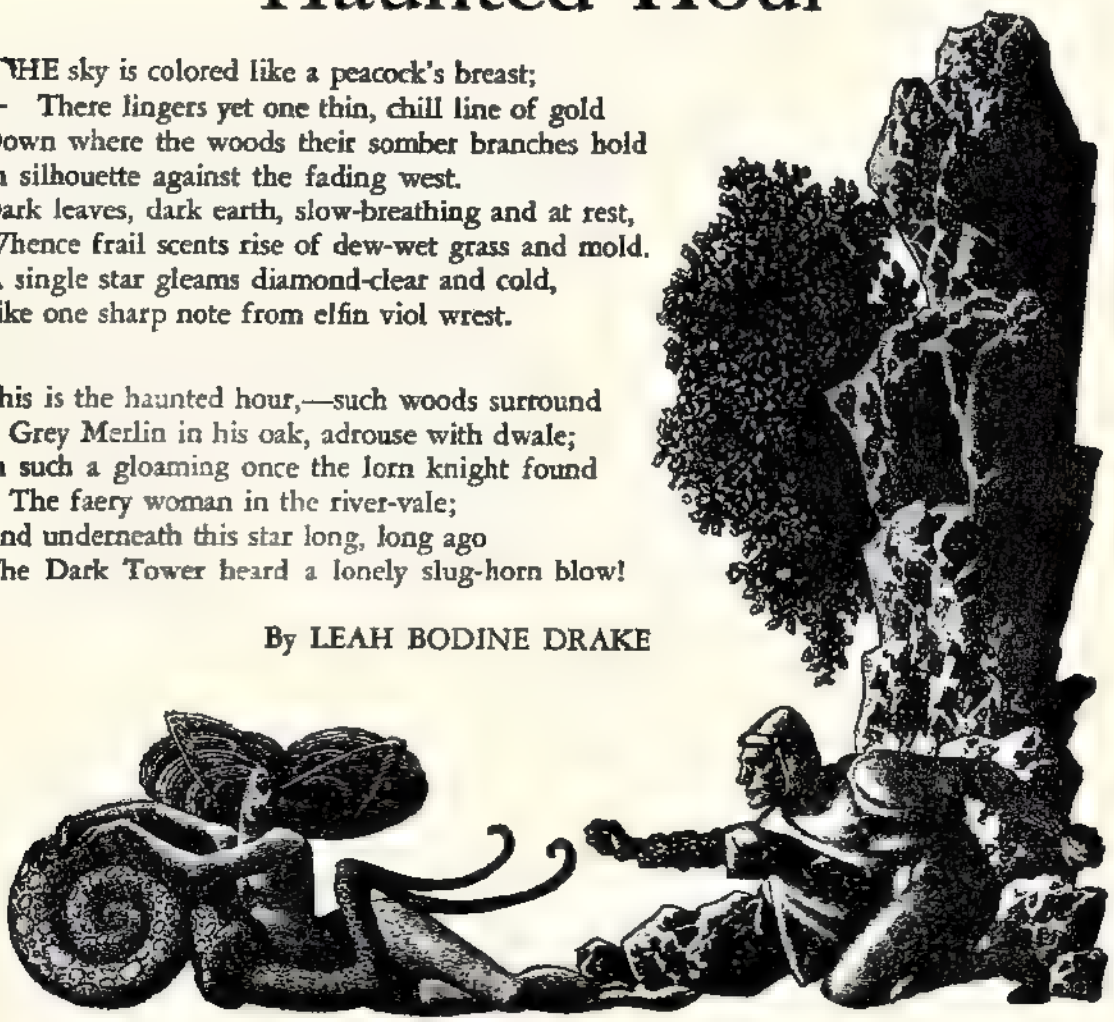
Not half so bewildered, however, as Inspector Talman, who, just to leave no avenue of doubt open, played back the last cylinder on the dictograph, heard Aswell's last lines, the crash of the window which had killed Aswell—and then a dry chuckle, so familiar to Spectro's devotees, and the cylinder's concluding words: *"Compliments of Spectro!"*

Haunted Hour

THE sky is colored like a peacock's breast;
There lingers yet one thin, chill line of gold
Down where the woods their somber branches hold
In silhouette against the fading west.
Dark leaves, dark earth, slow-breathing and at rest,
Whence frail scents rise of dew-wet grass and mold.
A single star gleams diamond-clear and cold,
Like one sharp note from elfin viol wrest.

This is the haunted hour,—such woods surround
Grey Merlin in his oak, adrouse with dwale;
In such a gloaming once the lorn knight found
The faery woman in the river-vale;
And underneath this star long, long ago
The Dark Tower heard a lonely slug-horn blow!

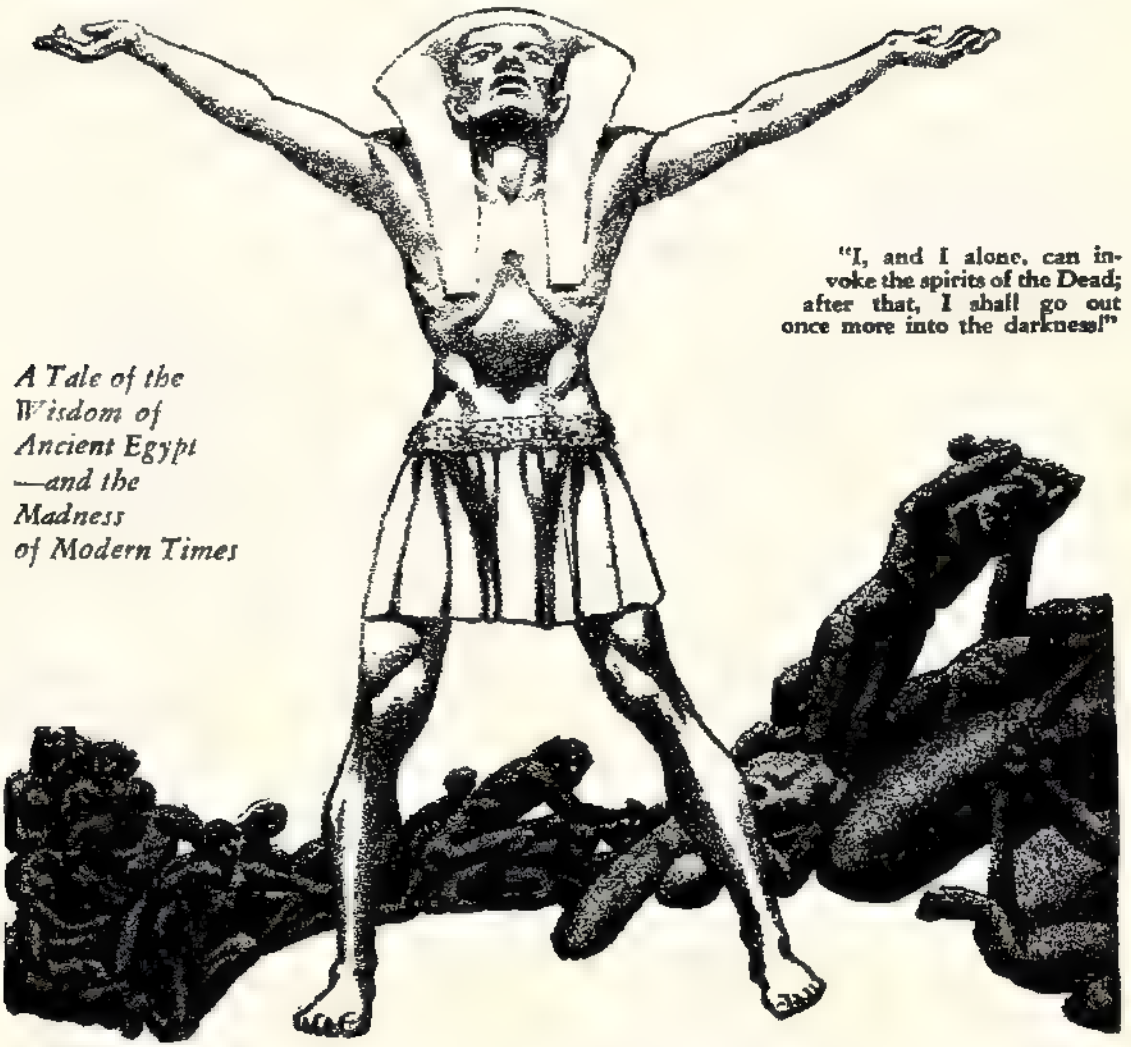
By LEAH BODINE DRAKE



He was conjured back to life, this man, by magic half as old as Time, by a secret formula buried deep in the dusty pages of—

The Book

A Tale of the Wisdom of Ancient Egypt —and the Madness of Modern Times



"I, and I alone, can invoke the spirits of the Dead; after that, I shall go out once more into the darkness!"

I

WHEN Eric Hanley left his coupé and started toward the house, Susan Blythe stepped out from the vine-covered arbor and called to him.

"Mr. Hanley!"

He turned. "Yes, Miss Blythe?"

"Would you mind?" she asked, motioning toward the arbor. "I want to talk to you about father—"

Hanley hesitated. His eyes went from the girl's face to the castle-like English house. She noted his hesitation and came a step closer.

"Please! I know he summoned you and it's that I want to talk to you about. I'm afraid—"

of the Dead

By FRANK GRUBER

Yes, she was afraid. Everything about her told Hanley that. Her wide eyes, the tautness of her face and the stiffness of her slender body. He moved toward the arbor.

"What is it? I know your father's been overworking, but—"

"It's not the overwork; well, perhaps it is. You were with him in Egypt. I—I want you to tell me what you found there, what it is that has changed him so."

"Hasn't he told you? Of his discovery?"

She shook her head. "No, but I know it's something important. He's locked himself in his work room for more than two weeks now. He won't let anyone in —and he won't come out. Martha has to

leave his food at the door and when he does think to eat it, he sets the dishes outside the door again. He won't even let me talk to him. He won't see anyone, except Professor Shepard."

"Shepard!" exclaimed Hanley. "I didn't think he would have anything to do with Shepard."

A little shiver seemd to ripple through Susan Blythe. "I don't like Professor Shepard. His eyes—"

Hanley's face hardened, but he withheld his opinion of Professor Martin Shepard.

It would only have worried Susan Blythe more, for Hanley had been quite sure the last time he had seen Professor Shepard that the man was mad. That had been three years ago.

He said: "I'm surprised your father's taken up with Professor Shepard." Yet the moment the words were out, he realized that he wasn't surprised at all. Two weeks ago, he had quarreled with Professor Blythe. "All right," Blythe had snapped at him, "if you won't help me, I'll get someone who will."

A frown creased Hanley's forehead and Susan Blythe saw it. "It's true, then, what I've suspected. He's engaged in an experiment. Something—evil—?"

The girl's guess caused Hanley to blink in surprise. His difference with Professor Blythe had been because of something that might be construed by an outsider as—evil!

He took a step away from the arbor. "Perhaps I'd better talk to your father—"

"I want you to, but I want you to promise that you'll tell me what he's doing when you come out. Will you do that?"

Hanley bit his lower lip, uneasily. "I may be forced to give my word to him, in which case—"

"Don't promise him!" exclaimed Susan Blythe. "If it's unreasonable, don't promise anything. Please—!" Her eyes were bright with tears that threatened to cascade down her face.

"I'll try—" Hanley mumbled and then backed hurriedly away from her. He almost ran to the big English house.

OLD Martha, grown gray in the service of the Blythes let him into the house. "Professor Blythe telephoned me to come and see him, Martha," Hanley told the housekeeper.

"Thank the lord!" breathed Martha. "Maybe *you* can make him stop that awful work he's doing."

"Awful, Martha?"

The housekeeper shuddered. "The smells that come from the lab'ratory. You'd think he was embalming some—"

Hanley left her in the hall. He hurried through the house to the door of the laboratory at the rear. When he reached it, he raised his fist and knocked loudly. He had to repeat the knock before an irascible voice inside, snapped: "What the devil do you want? I told you not to disturb me."

"It's Eric Hanley, Professor!"

Hanley heard an exclamation inside the laboratory, then after a moment the door was pulled inward.

The overpowering smell that struck Hanley caused him to reel back. Professor Blythe's lean hand reached through the aperture and catching Hanley's wrist pulled him into the room.

"Come in, come in," he snarled. "We haven't got all day."

"Ah," said another voice, "the brilliant young Egyptologist, Mr. Hanley!"

Hanley glowered at Professor Shepard, under whom he had studied twelve years before. Even then, Shepard had been eccentric. It was, in fact, but a year after Hanley's graduation from the university that Shepard himself had resigned—at the insistence of the university board, it was rumored at the time.

Behind Hanley, Professor Blythe was bolting the laboratory door.

Hanley, turning, said: "You went on, Professor Blythe. Why did you call me then? You know what I said—"

"I know what you said," Blythe said, harshly. "I know what I said, too. That I was on the verge of a discovery that would rock the world and I would be false to my calling if I did not pursue it to the ultimate conclusion. Well—I have, Hanley."

A cold wind seemed to blow against Eric Hanley's spine. His eyes went to the sarcophagus that stood upright against the far wall. The hinged top was open and the sarcophagus was empty. His head swiveled automatically to the table that stood just behind Professor Shepard. There was a long, large object on the table and although it was covered with a sheet, Hanley knew what the object was.

Muscles stood out in bunches on his jaws. He shook his head, slowly. "It's impossible."

"Impossible?" cried Professor Shepard. "Why should it be impossible? Everyone knows that the ancient Egyptians knew more about embalming and preservation than the moderns. Witness the sarcophagi of—"

"Wait a minute, Shepard," Professor Blythe cut in. He came toward Hanley and the latter looking into his eyes, thought for a moment that Blythe was going to take up where they had let off several weeks ago. But after a moment, Professor Blythe's eyes hardened again.

He said, "Eric, you had no faith in the papyrus. You gave it up because it was unintelligible."

"It was mere gibberish and you know it," Hanley declared. "I've studied the 18th Dynasty papyri in the Egyptian Museum at Cairo and I know that this one we found is either a forgery of a later period, or the work of a maniac or fool of the 18th Dynasty. There were both in that period, you know," he finished with a note of irony.

Professor Blythe inhaled deeply. "And there are fools, today. You're one, Hanley. And I'll admit that I was, too, for awhile. Just because we found the papyrus in an 18th Dynasty tomb we took it for granted that it had to be of that period. That's where we were wrong, Hanley. We should have known from the accoutrements of the tomb that it had been prepared for a savant of that day—a great savant. His colleagues wanted to do him an especial honor. Perhaps—not an honor. An experiment. They buried with him—the original Book of the Dead!"

Hanley gasped. "What are you talking about? The Book of the Dead goes back to the 14th—"

"Farther than that, Eric; to the 4th Dynasty. Eighteen hundred years before Christ. That's why you thought the papyrus unintelligible. Well, I've read it—at last. And I give you my word that the text of it is entirely different from the later Book of the Dead, which deals mainly with instructions for the soul of the dead in its journeys. This papyrus, *my* papyrus tells—"

"Don't!" cried Professor Shepard. "Don't tell him, Blythe. He's a scoffing upstart, who wouldn't believe even if he saw it."

Eric Hanley's eyes glinted. "Let me see it; I'll believe my own eyes—"

PROFESSOR BLYTHE led him to a desk on which was spread out, held down at strategic points with weights, an ancient, brittle strip of papyrus.

Hanley leaned over the hieroglyphics and the smudged finger of Professor Blythe pointed out symbols to him. "That's where you made your mistake, Hanley. There were fifteen hundred years between those dynasties. Recall how much the me-

dieval and modern languages changed in that many years. Compare your Latin of today with that of the time of the Roman empire. Compare your Chaucerian English with the English of today—"

"You have a translation of this papyrus?" Hanley asked, bluntly.

Professor Blythe hesitated, then reached under his tan smock and brought forth a folded sheet of paper. He handed it to Hanley, who opened it and glanced at the typed transcript. He had read less than a paragraph when he exclaimed in amazement. "This is absurd. Surely, you're not—"

BEHIND him Professor Shepard chuckled and Hanley whirled in time to see the former let fall the edge of the sheet covering the long object on the table.

Hanley was conscious again of the acrid smells in the room and as the significance of it all struck him his face blanched.

"You're not contemplating—" He stared in bewilderment at Professor Shepard's evil face, then continued, "on bringing back to life the mummy?"

Professor Blythe came up beside him and gripped his arm. "You saw the sarcophagus, Eric. In fact, you helped me smuggle it out of Egypt. You knew that it was in an unusually splendid state of preservation. You attributed that to the dry locale in which we found the tomb. You didn't know about—the Book of the Dead."

"Let me have it straight," Hanley said, slowly. "I can't grasp it—"

"All right, my boy," said Professor Blythe in a more composed tone. "You've already guessed, but I'll verify your guess. The sarcophagi contained the mummy of an unusual person. A distinctive one for the 18th Dynasty. We knew that from the hieroglyphics and the accoutrements of the tomb. A king or noble, we thought at first. We were wrong. The mummy is the mortal remains of a much more important person—Ramahadin!"

"Ramahadin, the last of the great high-priests?"

Blythe nodded. "When he died, the decline of Egypt began. There was never another great savant of whom there is record. We knew that, and let it go at that. We didn't try to determine the cause. Well, we found it—when we opened the sarcophagus. We thought it was so large because there were other, fitted casings inside. There weren't. There was just the mummy and a mass of papyri, which it will take years to study. So far we've studied only the one, the Book of the Dead, which was buried with Ramahadin. The reason—because Ramahadin's followers in their despair decided to bury all knowledge with the master. And the greatest of all that knowledge is the Book of the Dead, the translation of which you hold in your hand!"

"But this—this purports to tell how to bring Ramahadin back to life, when the world again needs this knowledge."

"That time is now!" cried Professor Shepard, "and—behold . . .!"

He suddenly caught hold of the sheet on the table and with a violent jerk swept it off, revealing the object on the table.

Eric Hanley uttered a low cry and then reeled back.

On the table, clad in yellow, musty robes lay the body of a man. Hanley took a step forward, stared down at the olive-colored skin, the firm flesh; cold perspiration broke out on his body.

"I—don't—believe—it—!" he said.

"Neither did I, at first," cried Professor Blythe. "No mummy was ever found in such a state of preservation, after twenty-four centuries. But—the papyrus tells the secret. The embalming of the dead was a closely-guarded secret even in the 18th Dynasty. The art died out completely just a few centuries later and even in the 18th

Dynasty it was not what it was a thousand years prior—fifteen hundred. The instructions of the original Book were not carried out. The only explanation is that the Book of the Dead was lost even then, for centuries. Ramahadin probably discovered it, deciphered it and entrusted the translation to one or two of his disciples, who followed its secrets in the preparation of Ramahadin's body—then in honor to him, or tribute, buried the Book with him."

Eric Hanley blinked and gazed in awe at the immobile features of the man on the table. "He looks as if he were only sleeping."

"He *is* sleeping," said Professor Shepard, "now—"

Hanley looked up sharply. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, we brought him to life. What do you think we've done here these last two weeks? Read the Book of the Dead?"

HANLEY put his face down to the head of the man on the table. Yes, he was breathing, slow measured breaths. A frown creased Hanley's forehead. This man was alive. But he couldn't be—unless they were playing a trick on him, perpetrating a hoax.

He looked again at the faces of the two scientists. And slowly he shook his head. Then he inhaled deeply and appealed to Professor Blythe.

"You can't do this, Professor. You can't bring a man dead for twenty-four centuries to life, to face the modern world. You don't know what will happen! And you'll be responsible!"

"Bah!" snorted Professor Shepard. "I don't know why the devil Blythe asked you here, anyway. The responsibility's ours—and so is the credit. Remember that, Hanley!"

He caught up a small copper cylinder. "All right, Blythe!"

"Wait!" cried Professor Blythe. "Perhaps we'd better strap him down. You can't tell—"

"Nonsense," retorted Shepard. "There are three of us here. We've dilly-dallied long enough. Here—"

He held the copper cylinder to the nostrils of the sleeping man, twisted it and removed the cap. A thin stream of bluish vapor curled out of it.

Hanley felt the short hair on the back of his neck stand up. He wanted more than anything in the world to run out of that room—but couldn't. He was a scientist as well as Blythe and Shepard.

He remained, his feet rooted to the floor, head craned forward, his eyes intent on the man on the table.

For a moment nothing happened and Professor Shepard exclaimed sharply.

And then . . . then the body twitched and moved. The eyelids flickered up, exposing eyes as black as obsidian. They stared straight at the ceiling for a moment, then rolled sideways and fastened themselves upon Eric Hanley.

The full lips parted and air was sucked into the mouth. The mouth opened and a single word came out—a sharp, guttural word:

"Dolmacho!"

Professor Blythe took a step forward. "Dolmachin!" he cried.

The black eyes left Hanley's face and fixed themselves upon Professor Blythe's taut, white face.

"Dolmachin—sidi!" he said.

Professor Blythe whirled upon Eric Hanley and exclaimed. "He understands our debased Egyptian." He turned back to the ancient Egyptian. *"Ramahadin, sidi?"*

"Ramahadin, yes! Who are you? Where am I?" The Egyptian sat up suddenly and his eyes shot wildly about the laboratory. Then a groan escaped his lips. "I do not understand," he said in his harsh, ancient Egyptian tongue. "My servants—where are they?"

"Dead!" said Professor Shepard. "They have been dead for twenty-four centuries. And you have been dead. We've just brought you back to life."

For a long moment the Egyptian stared at Professor Shepard, his eyes gradually dulling. "It must be so," he finally conceded, "you would not dare, otherwise. Not to Ramahadin. The experiment—succeeded?"

"Yes," said Professor Shepard. "You did not die at all. You were merely placed in a state of suspended animation. Your savants prepared your body for death—and you were dead—for twenty-four hundred years. And now you are alive!"

Ramahadin's eyes continued to roam about the laboratory. "What is all this? Who are you strange-looking creatures? Who is the Pharoah?"

"A boy is king of Egypt," Professor Blythe said. "A boy named Farouk. This is not Egypt, however. This is America, a land beyond the sea."

"The barbaric country beyond Sicily?"

"Rome? No, Ramahadin. Rome is alive—but almost dead. I forgot. You do not know.

"The glory that was Greece faded shortly after you died. The Romans became the greatest people of the earth. They conquered Egypt and sent their legions to all parts of the known world. They crushed Carthage and the land of the Jews. And then, in their turn, they were defeated. The Teutonic tribes of the north over-ran Europe—"

"And who defeated them?" asked Ramahadin.

"They were assimilated. War has ruled the earth ever since you were buried. The world is at war today, the greatest war of all time. Men fly through the skies—"

"That is a lie!" cried Ramahadin. "Men cannot fly, because they cannot grow wings."

"They built machines. One machine can carry fifty people for five thousand miles."

Ramahadin stared at Professor Blythe, then his eyes shifted to the face of Professor Shepard and in turn to Eric Hanley. All nodded.

"Men learned to fly," said Eric Hanley. "So they could drop bombs upon other men—terrible bombs that destroy entire cities. Man conquered the earth, the sky and the water. But he could not conquer man himself."

"I am hungry!" declared Ramahadin. "Bring me food."

Professor Blythe went to the house telephone. "Martha," he ordered. "Bring a tray of food to the door. Set it down outside and then leave—no, only for one."

HE HUNG up and turned back, just as Ramahadin put his feet upon the floor. "America," he said, "this must then be the country of Atlantis—the unknown land."

"Yes, I guess you could call it Atlantis," Hanley said. "But it is today the greatest country in the world. The richest and the most powerful—"

"And it is at war?"

"No. But we are aiding the Britons in their war against the Teutons and the Romans. We are sending them ships and airplanes—"

"The Romans, bah!" snapped Ramahadin. "They have always been at war. One tribe always fought the other and when neither had anything to fight about they went to sea in their galleys and became pirates. There is no civilization but Egypt's. Greece is too young—ah, but I forget! What kind of civilization do you have in this America?"

"The greatest the world has even known," said Hanley. "We have conquered disease and pestilence. We have built machines that fly through the air. We have invented instruments by which we can talk to men in Egypt five thousand

miles away. We can talk through the very air itself—thousands of miles!"

"But you are still fighting other men? Bah!"

There was a knock at the door and Professor Blythe opened it cautiously. He reached out and, bringing in a tray, closed the door again.

The Egyptian came forward eagerly. He looked at the food upon the tray, grunted and reached for it with both hands. He ate ravenously. When he had finished he belched.

"Now, I would see your world."

Hanley's lips tightened. He looked at Professor Blythe. The scientist's mouth twitched. "I am afraid—"

"Why not?" interrupted Professor Shepard. "Didn't we bring him back to life to see how he would react to our modern civilization . . . ?"

"No!" cried Hanley. "Not yet. He must see it gradually—"

"Pah!" snorted Ramahadin. "I will see it all, at once. Lead the way."

"You can't," protested Hanley.

RAMAHADIN gave him a cold look. "Who is this stripling?" he demanded. "Who is this youngster who dares to question Ramahadin?"

"He is a very able scientist," Professor Blythe said. "He is—"

"I am Ramahadin!" declared the Egyptian. "All scientists bow to me—"

Professor Shepard snickered. "You're a mummy, Ramahadin, a mummy we brought to life. The world doesn't even know you exist."

"You dog!" cried Ramahadin. "Down on your knees." He scooped up an empty plate and suddenly hurled it at Shepard. The professor ducked and the plate missed him by less than an inch.

Ramahadin snarled and picked up a chair. Hanley stepped forward and caught his arm. Ramahadin jerked himself free and whirled upon Hanley with the raised chair.

Hanley sidestepped and smashed his fist against the Egyptian's jaw. Ramahadin reeled back. The chair crashed to the floor and he stared at Hanley.

"You dare to strike Ramahadin?" he cried in a tone of awe. "You dog, you dare—"

"Please!" interrupted Professor Blythe. "Listen to me. Ramahadin, it is true. This is a new world. You have been dead twenty-four hundred years. Things have changed. We don't want to shock you by showing you too much at once!"

"I am Ramahadin," the Egyptian said, persistently. "I have the knowledge of the ages. There is nothing you could show me or tell me, that would shock me. I have meditated on it all. Your flying machines—pah! They do not frighten me. Your clothing is bizarre, that is all—"

"And speaking of clothes," said Hanley. "You've got to put some on. You can no longer go in public without suitable apparel."

"Fetch me clothing then. I will make that concession."

Professor Blythe, frowning, went to a closet. He brought out one of his own suits, a somewhat soiled shirt and socks and shoes. With his assistance, Ramahadin was able to dress. He looked then like any swarthy man, whose counterpart could have been seen by the hundreds in any large city.

"Now, show me your America, Ramahadin said, when he was dressed.

"I wouldn't," Hanley said, quickly.

"You can't keep him in here, a prisoner!" Professor Shepard exclaimed.

Blythe's forehead creased. Then he shrugged and moved to the door. Ramahadin brushed past him. Hanley overtook him in the hall, leading to the living room.

He was too late, however. Susan Blythe rose from an armchair and looked in sur-

prise at Ramahadin. Hanley said, quickly: "Susan, this is an acquaintance of your father's. He speaks only Egyptian. His name is Ramahadin."

Susan bowed to the Egyptian. She said to Hanley. "When did he get here? I didn't see anyone come up today—"

"He was here all night," Professor Blythe said, hurriedly. "He arrived last night after you had retired. He's—an Egyptian scientist. Professor Shepard and I are consulting with him."

"Whose woman is this?" Ramahadin said suddenly, in Egyptian.

"She is my daughter," Professor Blythe said.

"What strange clothes she wears." Ramahadin grunted. "She is too thin, but I will accept her."

Cold wind seemed to blow upon the back of Eric Hanley's neck. He saw the glitter in the ancient Egyptian's eyes and he said, softly, "This is a different civilization, Ramahadin. Women are no longer sold—or given away—by their fathers."

"Pah!" snorted Ramahadin. "Women are cheap."

"Not in this world," chuckled Professor Shepard. "I was married to one—once. She kept me poor, buying clothes for her."

"Then you were a fool. A purple Phoenician robe is the best any woman can want. How do men acquire women in this new world?"

"They marry them, with the woman's consent," Hanley replied, curtly.

"Very well, then, tell this woman I will marry her.

Eric Hanley started to speak, but Professor Blythe was ahead of him.

"That, too, must wait until you know more of the world you've come into," he said, and it was very apparent that his words carried weight with the Egyptian; possibly Ramahadin recognized knowledge as power, one scholar to another.

"Anyway," went on Susan's father—who was blessed with a sense of humor, which was beginning to assert itself now that the first shock of the success of his experiment was wearing off—"I can't imagine where one would shop for a Phoenician robe, purple or otherwise."

This last remark being in English puzzled Susan, but, being a scientist's daughter, she shrugged her shoulders, and gave Eric a look as if to say that she had told him she feared for her father's sanity in the midst of such extraordinary experiments.

II

LATER it was all explained to her, and although Eric had expected her to view the whole miracle with horror, she seemed to take it in her stride—although both she and Hanley regarded Professor Shepard's association with her father as one of evil. Blythe seemed to have forgotten his disagreement with Eric Hanley and accepted him as one of the circle responsible for the bringing of Ramahadin into a modern world.

The scientists contended that their primary interest was in seeing how the ancient Egyptian reacted to that world—once they had satisfied themselves that the unholy formula from the Book of the Dead would actually work. Also, its possibilities were boundless. Professor Shepard would have started for Egypt at once to unearth, steal, borrow or buy other sarcophagi to experiment with their contents, but world conditions forbade. Men seemed intent on destroying civilization, not on studying the secrets of its origins.

There remained to them Ramahadin himself, and the Egyptian presented a phenomenon extraordinary past all telling. He went about the modern world with a sort of calm superciliousness which pleased Shepard, but annoyed Blythe, and they all were startled when some three days after

his resuscitation—or reincarnation—he appeared able to speak perfect English.

"Of course," he said when Professor Blythe's astounded comments on this was made, "have I not the knowledge of all the ages—including yours?"

Susan, he still regarded as about to become his property, but the girl's way of meeting this astonished and amused both her father and Eric. She treated the powerful High Priest of All Knowledge as a callow youth who might make love to her, but who couldn't possibly be old enough to know his own mind. This attitude at once puzzled and annoyed Ramahadin, but served its purpose—that of keeping the Egyptian at the distance Susan desired.

They all treated him as a guest and took turns showing him the world to which he had returned after twenty-four hundred years. Eric Hanley had some fears of government intervention—a check up of all aliens in the country was being made—but Professor Shepard poo-poohed this. "He is a visitor staying with us," he said, "and that will be enough in the meantime. We can certainly fix it up with the authorities later."

"One thing I have already observed in this country," said Ramahadin, "is that you go to a great deal of trouble to enact laws, then to just as much trouble to ignore them, or get around them or to know some way of fixing the authorities."

"Of course," said Professor Shepard, "that's the way we get along."

"I don't agree," replied Professor Blythe. "Some of our citizens may get along that way, but it's not the way a democracy such as ours has become great."

"Wait till you understand us a bit better," said Eric Hanley.

That understanding in itself was interesting, since two distinct forces were at work promoting it. Shepard's idea was to use the Egyptian's great powers to bring to culmination vast schemes of his own; to help him gain fame, money and authority. This authority was to be in the world of science, but was to dominate—as the others soon realized—the underworld. He and Ramahadin spent many hours in a laboratory which Shepard maintained in a secret place away from the Blythes, and he tried more and more to disassociate himself from the older man. One result of this was to restore Eric Hanley entirely to Blythe's good graces, and fear for the future of Ramahadin and their astounding experiment with the Book of the Dead made this bond even tighter. It included Susan, who wasn't a scientist's daughter for nothing and who realized the profound effect Ramahadin's appearance might have on the world.

Professor Blythe tried to remonstrate with Shepard.

"You must not seek from Ramahadin secrets not shared by all of us," he said. "Our knowledge of the forgotten lore of ancient peoples must be pooled; it must be given out by us gradually and—yes, reverently."

Shepard only laughed. "I know much now," he said, "that could control the fate of our country and the world."

AS SHEPARD seemed able to win more and more of Ramahadin's confidence Eric Hanley began to have profound fears, and he and Susan formed a dangerous plan. It was to attract Ramahadin to their way of thinking, to keep him more and more in their company, to show him more and more of the every day vital life of the great new world around him. And to do this they both realized it would be Susan who must pit herself against Shepard's influence. She would have to put aside her distaste for the swarthy stranger—and the risk was great that the price she would have to pay would be high.

Susan it was who persuaded Ramahadin to spend long hours with the Blythes. Here

he held many discussions with her father about social progress through the ages, analyzed the history of many peoples who had risen and fallen during the long years since Ramahadin had lived upon the earth.

"History has followed a pattern," the Egyptian expounded to them. "Peoples have succeeded or failed, as the gods willed, but also according to the might of their minds. This is a good world here in Atlantis."

"Among themselves Ramahadin alalluded to the country of his emergence from the past as Atlantis, although his miraculous mastering of English and his fantastic ability to absorb facts made it possible for him to talk glibly to others of "the Middle West" the "mental processes of the Deep South," etc. That his mind held just as detailed and intricate knowledge of world-shaping events of the past was apparent. How this vast wealth of learning was to be infiltrated into modern America was the problem before them. Ramahadin's own scholarly mind seemed to be winning the ascendant over his domineering spirit, and his interest in the news of the new world war was unceasing. He would compare Hitler with other dictators of eight hundred, a thousand years ago. He realized and comprehended the modern mechanical means of slaughter, but maintained that now, as always—it would be man's spirit that would win.

A certain slyness returned to his manner when he realized how keenly Susan was feeling the effect of the war. She became tense with anxiety when more and more of Europe was overcome, and the growing war spirit of America caused her many sleepless nights.

"You would have this stopped?" he asked. "I could conjure up spirits who would combat the essence of evil abroad on this planet," he said, "but"—and the tone of this voice stopped her eagerness—"my price is one only you can pay."

The conversation ended there with the entry of Professor Shepard, but Susan turned it over and over in her mind. Was it to be given to her to pay a price that would save humanity; was she, Susan Blythe, modern young America in person, to be a sacrifice to Ancient Egypt?

Her association with Eric Hanley had generated a feeling not only of mutual interests with the brilliant young scientist, but of a growing love, and her heart was his—yet both realized they must keep the High Priest on the side of humanity, not of the forces of evil.

Shepard they saw more rarely as time went on, and Ramahadin and he worked together less often. With this arrangement Shepard was keenly dissatisfied, and he and Professor Blythe had a violent disagreement over the custody of both the translation and original papyrus of the Book of the Dead.

"It is ours jointly, of course," said the older man, "but it shall remain in my safe until I am satisfied that spread of its knowledge is warranted."

"The formulae I need," said Shepard, "and I mean to have. You must allow me access to the safe."

"All in good time," said Professor Blythe, and stood his ground in spite of Shepard's threat of violence.

Their altercation was interrupted by the entrance of Susan, Eric and Ramahadin who had been on a visit to one of the great new industries manufacturing war implements.

"I cannot but grieve," said the Egyptian, "that the vast knowledge that man has achieved since I last was on earth is still turned to the art of waging war. It should not be."

"Conquest is power, and power is what we all crave," said Professor Shepard. "I want Professor Blythe to use the power given him by the knowledge contained in the Book of the Dead, but he refuses."

"THE Book of the Dead no longer exists save in my mind," replied Ramahadin calmly. "I destroyed it—its translation and its secret formulae."

"You *what?*" gasped Professor Blythe, and his eyes turned toward the safe.

"That was only too easy to open," said the Egyptian. "I felt that you men were not great enough, not worthy enough, if you will, to have such a secret in your possession."

"Other secrets of yours I have," shouted Professor Shepard whose anger had prevented his speaking at the Egyptian's portentous announcement. "I shall use them as I will—to destroy or save mankind as I decide."

"One great secret of my knowledge you can never possess," announced Ramahadin, "because it is of the spirit, not of the intellect."

"I know the Law of Taxeticon," said Shepard. "That will neutralize the power of high explosive."

"You know only a part of it," replied Ramahadin.

"You instructed me in the theories of harnessing the pull of gravity," retorted Shepard. "That will govern all airship construction."

"Such knowledge must be shared, Shepard, such was our agreement," broke in Professor Blythe.

"It is mine, and mine alone now," cried Shepard. "I can use it as I will. Ramahadin has shared with me the hypnotic powers of his cult of High Priests; I can rule men's minds. He has given me the secret formula by which Gravitas and his medieval college of mind doctors changed human brains; I can mold men's very souls. He has shown me the secrets of the power of the stars over the movements of vessels upon the sea.

"From here in America I shall rule the world; I, Emory Shepard, shall be more powerful than Hitler, wiser than—"

"It is true," broke in Ramahadin, "I have told you much—too much, I realize—but from it all you have not learned the greatest lesson of all, that it is not wise to shout aloud your knowledge. We realize the danger of your power my friend, and that in itself reduces much of its value.

"Let me tell you that since I have gone about this country of yours, I have become convinced that in it is the spirit which will save the world of the future—and nothing as puny as you will stand between it and its purpose. I have spoken!"

Even as his voice faded out, Ramahadin seemed to take on the stature of the priest of old and his listeners were as awed and incapable of speech or action as were his satellites of untold centuries before.

When the spell was broken, Shepard lay on the sofa in a coma and his breathing was scarcely perceptible.

"When he wakes up," said Ramahadin, "his mind will be a blank. He should not have challenged the lore of all the ages. It is too bad I had to destroy all his present knowledge, but he was too weak a man to possess mine—which unfortunately I did not at first realize."

And with a shrug he dismissed the whole matter from his mind.

III

SUSAN was sitting on the hotel porch high on the mountain side. Opposite her was Eric Hanley and the man whose powers of wizardry had been demonstrated to them only a few days before. Susan herself could hardly believe that the swarthy gentleman in impeccable evening dress whose figure she could just make out in the gathering dusk, could be the same creature that her father and Professor Shepard had conjured from the past.

They had come to this mountain resort to escape the city's heat. And now in the clear air were sitting in front of the hotel watching the daylight fade. Far below

them they could see the headlights of cars as they followed the winding road through the dense forests and along the cliffs where roadways had been cut. They would see a light at one point, watch it vanish, then reappear at the next bend or opening farther on.

"Like the souls of men," said Ramahadin. "They pass through one existence, go out into infinity and return again where men may see them."

"Not quite," came the voice of Professor Blythe, who had slipped into a chair beside them. "For if we were to cut away the trees and level the intervening hills we should be able to see the lights continuously—men's naked souls would continue on unceasingly."

"And that," said the voice of Ramahadin from the darkness, "is the power I can sway; and you two men and one woman—alone of all the world—will know the truth of the phenomenon which will soon shake the earth."

His voice seemed all pervading, yet must have reached their ears alone, for groups of people further along the hotel porch seemed oblivious of its portent.

Susan's hand found Eric's in the darkness—was her hour of decision at hand?

But reassurance came from the darkness.

"From you, Susan, I ask nothing further than you have given me," went on the High Priest. "You have shown me that a woman who is true and steadfast can be worthy of her place in this world of America. You I leave to Eric—and with you both the knowledge that faith in ideals such as yours will survive.

"Tonight I leave you; I go high into the mountains—and for me there will be no return, no second conjuring up by the Book of the Dead. I was brought back to show the world the way out of oppression; and after that I shall go out once more into darkness. For I, and I alone, can invoke the spirits of the dead to save the living. Against the forces of evil rampant in the world I shall conjure up the spirits of the oppressed from all ages and generations. The shades of the martyrs, the ghosts of all men who died for freedom, the spirits of those who perished in every righteous cause since the dawn of time shall come trooping at my call to force back the power for evil that threatens the free men on the earth today.

"For I am Ramahadin, Ramahadin the great, Ramahadin the keeper of the secrets of all the ages and my will shall prevail—keep your faith, you men of science, for faith and knowledge alone will save the world."

Susan felt again the enormous power she had sensed the day that Professor Shepard had defied Ramahadin, and heard herself murmuring words she scarcely knew she remembered:

"Keep ye the faith, the faith our fathers sealéd us,
Whoring not with visions over-wise and over stale. . . ."

IV

ERIC and Susan were listening to the radio—it was weeks, months later; sometimes it seemed as if time itself had ceased altogether. Over the air was coming a dramatic account of the final battle which settled the world conflict; an eye witness, an intrepid correspondent for the powerful press of America was telling of what he had seen that climactic day when right at last triumphed.

"It seemed as if superhuman strength were given the defenders of our way of life," the voice proclaimed. "Nothing daunted them, nothing stopped them . . . *it was as if the spirits of their fathers returned again and led their sons to victory!*"

Eric and Susan looked at each other, and remembered that the High Priest had said that they alone of all the world would recognize the truth.

It Happened to Me

WEIRD TALES will pay ten dollars apiece for true psychic experiences. Have you ever slept in a haunted house, or been chased by a ghost? Have you ever dreamed a dream that came true? Has your life been saved by a vision? Let the other readers of WEIRD TALES know about your weird experience. Your story must be briefly told, in not more than a thousand words; the shorter the better. It must be true, interesting, and must deal with the supernatural. Write it down today and send it to WEIRD TALES, "It Happened to Me" department, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y. We will pay ten dollars for every one used.

THE GUARDIAN ANGEL

By SIGMOND MILLER

IT'S a long stretch between Jackson City and Logan, every bit of three hundred miles. The fast trains that come through here, if they're behind time, can easily build up a good speed and make the schedule, for it's a straight run. No need to slow down; no difficult bends and very few cross roads.

On this spring night the fog was unusually heavy. Engineer Timson pulled out his big watch. "On time," he said laconically.

I wiped my brow; I'm the fireman. "Kinda heavy fog t'night."

Timson grunted and busied himself at the controls. The huge panting locomotive got under way. Soon the click-clack of the wheels beat rhythmically and the crack Western Limited moved along at high speed.

For an hour neither of us said anything, but attended to our duties. We were making good time despite the fog. Suddenly Timson shouted out in a strange voice. "My eyes must be goin' back on me. Do yuh see what I see?"

I looked out of the cab and saw directly ahead and above what seemed to be nothing else but a silhouette of a black Angel. The wings were wide and black and the apparition rode the sky with the same speed as the train. "Almighty God!" I said in an awed whisper. "What is that!"

"Yuh see it too, don't yuh?"

I nodded.

"It looks like the Angel of Death," said Timson, his voice packed with fear.

"It's a warning!" I shouted, quite frightened. "Put on the brakes!"

The engineer needed no urging. The locomotive came to a quick halt.

Both of us got off. The apparition remained stationary in the sky. It moved or seemed to beckon. "It's trying to warn us. Maybe something wrong with the engine," I said.

We walked around the huge boiler tube examining the eccentric crank, the reversing links, the connecting rods, but found nothing wrong.

The figure in the sky remained where it was.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" I said with great relief.

"What yuh find?" asked the engineer walking over to me.

"It's just a moth stuck on the headlight. Just threw a shadow in the sky like a movin' picture." I handed Timson the fluttering moth.

"Yuh certainly scared the daylights outa me," said Timson, looking fascinatedly at the insect.

"Sure is one on us. Wait'll the boys hear this one."

"Let's get goin'. We're losin' time," said Timson, himself again.

"Wait a minute. Hear somethin'?"

Timson listened. "That surely sounds like water. That must be Chapman's Creek."

"Kinda loud for a little creek. Let's go see what it is."

"Short ten minutes a'ready. But we can take a quick look."

We followed the tracks down a hundred feet or so and suddenly the tracks disappeared into an expanse of water. The trestle over Chapman's Creek was gone. What was once a small stream was now a raging, roaring river, flooded by the heavy spring rains.

For a long time we stared down at it unbelievingly, then turned and looked at each other's pale faces. Silently, we walked back to the panting engine.

(*From the French of Charles P. Baudelaire*)

Translated by

TIMEUS GAYLORD

IN shelter of the vaulted yews,
Like alien gods who shun the world,
The flown owls wait with feathers furled;
Darting red eyes, they dream and muse.

In rows unmoving they remain
Till the sad hour that they remember,
When, treading down the sun's last ember,
The towering night resumes its reign.

Their attitude will teach the seer
How wise and needful is the fear
Of movement and of travailment:

For shadow-drunken wanderers bear
On all their ways the chastisement
Of having wished to wend elsewhere.

THE EYRIE

Witchcraft and the Merry Monarch

Most of us have had, at one time or another, a sneaking suspicion that history had dealt harshly with King Charles II of England. But is it possible that Black Magic and the Powers of Darkness, also, gave a raw deal to that pleasant gentleman who "never said a foolish thing, and never did a wise one"?

Read Mr. Wellman's interesting sidelight on his story, *The Liers in Wait,* and decide for yourself!

BRIEFLY and bluntly, I admit that *The Liers in Wait* might well have happened just as I have set it down.

We know, from standard history, that Charles II fled forlornly after his defeat at Worcester in 1651, and that even in the first hours of his flight the rumor went up that witchcraft had been used against him. As my story asks rhetorically, where and when else have Scots troops refused to fight? And why should rain have fallen only on the wood where Charles hid, and nowhere else? How about Cromwell's exact seven years of unrestrained temporal power?

Charles II was a secret man. We are not sure of even his religious faith, if he had any. He never made public his own narrative of that wonderful escape in disguise, though some of his helpers and companions wrote fascinatingly about it. We do know that he was alone for a full day in Spring Coppice, and that anything might have happened there. Assuredly he acted in later life like a pleasure-loving but thoughtful man who had known a strange shock in his youth. And in those days England was full of witches—everywhere.

Many scholars, even modern scholars, believe that Cromwell's regime had the support of black magic. The erudite Father Montague Summers opines that "beyond any shadow of doubt, Oliver Cromwell was a Satanist, intimately leagued with the powers of darkness to whom he sold his soul for temporal success." James Grant, in his monumental work on demonology of all nations, quotes Cromwell's lieutenant, Colonel Lindsay, as saying that the commander of the Parliamentarians spoke with the devil in his presence, and made the aforesaid seven-year contract. I could cite others.

Much as I admire Summers and Grant, I take leave to differ with their view of Cromwell. He was fierce and harsh and greedy for dictatorial power—but he would not have parlied even with Satan. More reasonable, I argue, is the thought that among his followers (as everywhere in that time and place) were traffickers with wizards.

The spells and conjurations of my three witches I quote almost exactly from a curious and probably dangerous volume of such things, attributed to Albertus Magnus and annotated here and there in a mordantly knowing longhand. For the style of the narrative I have studied again the Restoration writers—notably Bunyan, Evelyn, Pepys and Wycherly.

Back of it all is sympathy, if not admiration, for Charles II, who was most consistently well-meaning. Probably he was a practical liability to his age, and Cromwell a practical asset; yet how pleasant we find Charles, and how forbidding Old Noll! If this be Jacobitism, make the most of it!

MANLY WADE WELLMAN

The Other Worlds

FOR all of you who enjoy adventures into the worlds beyond (and it goes without saying that, as a reader of WEIRD TALES, you are a connoisseur of the uncanny)—there's a swell book called *The Other Worlds* (Wilfred Funk, $2.50); it's an anthology of outside-this-life fiction edited by Phil Stong, one of America's more successful writers, an expert on the unknown, and a front rank critic of weird fiction.

The Other Worlds carries the "twenty-five most outstanding modern stories of free imagination of the past decade" . . . the "best since Frankenstein and Dracula."

And fully half of these stories—carefully picked from a sifting of 20,000 published and unpublished yarns—have been taken from WEIRD TALES; many from recent issues, others from the WEIRD TALES of long ago.

The book is divided into three sections: "Strange Ideas," "Fresh Variants," and "Horrors." The "Strange Ideas" are short story notions which, Mr. Stong says, appealed to him because he had never heard of them before.

"Fresh Variants" is of much the same genre, except that the ideas of origin are of earlier use, though pleasantly and ingeniously diverted into new channels and conclusions.

"Horrors" is the most conventional. The language of this type of tale, the compiler feels, should be simple and unpretentious. Concerning such hair raisers, Mr. Stong writes: "The ghost story per se is not necessarily a horror story, because a great many or nearly all of them can be read without any psychic discomfort. The final desideratum of the horror story is that this feeling should be translated to the hair on the back of the neck—that is, *physically* experienced. This feat is accomplished about once in a literary coon's age, so that it is not strange that in the following collection only one has this effect on me. I shall not name it; but I think the reader will discover it." We think we know which one Mr. Stong means. When you read the book, we'd be interested to hear what story you believe it is.

Ghost stories, weird stories and horror stories, he says, are three differently feathered birds—and while the horror story is almost invariably weird, the ghost and weird tales are seldom horrible.

There are, you will be glad to hear, no stories about Mars or monkeymen. Instead, the book contains horror tales that would reduce the temperature of a smelting plant—and humorous fantasies to balance off the "grims" with "grins" that are really laugh making. And although every story is convincing while it is read, you will not find any tale here that is even remotely possible. For, as Phil Stong says, ". . . . this crop is not marred by any appeals to reason. If you dig up a god in your garden who assures you that your worst lies are not only true but always have been, don't bother Einstein; come and see me."

Or better still—if you are always seeking an answer to questions that are unanswerable—stay with us as a permanent reader of WEIRD TALES.

Writing l.g. After Your Name

ANOTHER recent book, which we are sure will appeal to WEIRD TALES readers, is a very modern story of lycanthropy. This is Franklin Gregory's *The White Wolf* (Random House, New York, $2). The story is set in that part of Pennsylvania where he who rides may see many hex signs on the barns, and where the horned finger sign for warding off the evil eye is universally recognized; so a modern werewolf fantasy fits uncommonly well into that background.

Opening in Philadelphia, a lovely young socialite develops such amazing symptoms that her father begins to think she has inherited some strange powers from her remote ancestors. Studies of family records indeed show the mystic symbols l.g. after some of their names—and this can only mean *loup garou*. How this appalling heritage is brought home to a group of intelligent modern skeptics—a group which includes news reporters, press photographers and a consulting psychiatrist, not to mention the earnest young gentleman farmer who is the girl's fiance—offers good

opportunity for an adept working out of a genuinely weird plot. Incidentally, we had the opportunity of reading this story in manuscript—and felt it would have been an ideal serial for WEIRD TALES had space permitted. As it is, we can very enthusiastically recommend the book to the fans; for the author is the worthy follower of a great tradition.

Up the Garden Path?

From Crandon, Wisconsin, Virginia Combs writes:

I have just read the last issue of WEIRD TALES and enjoyed it immensely, as usual. *Where are you, Mr. Biggs* belonged in an StF mag, but it was a good story just the same. I do have a kick about *Birthmark*. Nonsense. The minute I read it I said to myself, "Mr. Quinn is leading us up the garden." If Mrs. Watrous had been carried off by the gorilla only *one* week before she was delivered, there was no possibility of the child having a physical mark as a result of her mother's fright. She might have had monkey-like tendencies, such as surprising agility of the feet to grasp and hold things, and an ungirlish ability to climb trees, but that is all. I am no doctor, but a child, even premature, as Fedocia doubtless was, cannot assume a physical appearance foreign to the species homo in one week. The foetus must have been fully developed, for Fedocia lived and was healthy although born only one week after her mother's fright. Do you suppose that some chemical reaction of fear in the mother's blood dissolved a pair of human feet on an unborn infant and replaced them with those of a gorilla? Nonsense Mr. Quinn. If you had said that Fedocia was born five months later, such a birthmark might have been possible, if you believe in such things, and I have seen enough in my short span to know that not all things are guessed at in our philosophy.

On the other hand, I thought the nature of the birthmark in taste with the events that lead up to it. The gorilla did not harm Mrs. Watrous, only frightened her, therefore Fedocia's beauty remained unmarred. Only her feet showed that tragic influence.

Ye Anciente Booke of Runes

Edward Goodell writes from Kansas City, Kansas:

I wish to thank you for printing my letter in full in the last issue of WEIRD TALES; I have received some very nice letters from people all over the country.

I am inclosing an actual spell in poem form from the book of Runes that I mentioned in my former letter to you (the one that was published). It has been translated from the Old English script that it was originally written in. I have had to add a modern word, or series of words, here and there to keep it in rhyme, as the original is. I have called it *The Witch's Curse*, though it is really the spell to kill a rival.

THE WITCH'S CURSE

A pentagon drawn in chicken's blood,
Lighted by lamps of a grave's dank mud,
Now I weave my spell my vengeance to wreak,
On her whose beauty my lover would seek,
I'll curse her with toil, I'll curse her with trouble,
Ah! The cauldron begins to bubble.

First a snake, a toad, a bat,
And now a lump of corpse's fat,
Now the eye of a Gypsy newly dead,
Oh! To see her writhe in her bed.

Next an owl's claw, and a walnut hull,
And then the moss from a dead man's skull,
Now the head of an eel, a scorpion's sting,
That to her will agony bring.
Last a handful of maggots, and carrion flies,
With these I curse her shining eyes.

Now I take up a mannikin made of church candles stole,
Soon Satan my master will have her pale soul.
How I rock with laughter, and cackle in glee,
As I think of the horrors that's coming to she.
Now I dress the thing up in her kerchief so white,
That I filched from her room in the dead of the night,
Now a lock of her hair she never missed,
As in her dreams my lover she kissed.

Holding the image of her a-cursed,
Into the knees the needles go first,
Now into the arms and the eyes staring small,
I know as I do this she swooning will fall,
At last now a pin pushed into the head,
I now am avenged. For the girl, she is dead.

We're all out of issues for *May* and Sept., 1940; so we'd be very glad to hear from readers who have copies of these issues which they wish to sell—or who would like to trade them in for newer issues, or any back numbers that they may have missed and would like to read.

If you're interested, please get in touch with the Subscription Department, WEIRD TALES, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.

A Dreamer and His Dream

IN TUNE with Edmond Hamilton's novelette of dreams and dreamers, is this interesting, very revealing letter to Seabury Quinn from Russell E. Nihlean, of Chicago, Illinois. For Mr. Nihlean, like Henry Stevens in the fantasy *Dreamer's Worlds*, has a dream which is as real, as true to life as life itself. Here, then, is his story, a story which—because he feels, as we do, that it will prove of real and genuine interest to every reader of the magazine—he has kindly consented to let us publish in the Eyrie:

Dear Mr. Quinn:

Fourteen years have passed since I read the first of your writings, and I still buy WEIRD TALES, eager to devour your next tale.

Often I have wished that I might know you, and find out what sort of a man wrote these stories, but I feared that if I did write to you in my youth, you would toss the article aside with a smile, thinking that "here was just another young admirer." So I have waited fourteen or fifteen years to write, and I am now thirty-three.

Of late you have buried the good Doctor Trowbridge, and the Good Jules, to tell of other tales. Of these, the last two were best. And choosing between them, I think your *Song Without Words* (July, 1941, issue) was the better. I say this because the story struck a resounding cord within me.

You see, like Chester Gunnerson in this story, I also am handicapped. I have been a victim of Infantile Paralysis since I was thirteen months old. I get around with the aid of a crutch and cane, and am able to earn my own living. I have worked at everything from newspaper reporting to selling automobiles. I have been on WPA and on Relief. And have come up with a grin on my puss, ready to start anew. I hate a whiner. I think that the world don't owe anybody a damn thing but a man has a right to take from the world if he can.

I, like Chester Gunnerson, have loved women and they have laughed at me when my back was turned, as they did him, for a filthy cripple. And it has hurt me as it hurt him. That is why I could not help but to extend to him my fullest sympathy.

In your tale a ghost brings solace to Chester Gunnerson. When I am wounded to the quick, a dream brings rest to me. It has been so ever since I was a child of about five.

Listen. In the dream I seem to be in an ancient land of hot sands and palm trees. There is a broad brown river, and a ship of many oars and a striped sail. I am aboard this boat clad in a white purple trimmed toga. With me is a woman. The woman is young and beautiful. Beautiful with jet black hair, azure blue eyes, a sweet prideful mouth. The hair is straight and falls square cut across a wide brow over thick eyebrows that almost meet. The nose is short and straight. Proud is this woman's carriage and she wears the diadem of Ancient Egypt. At least that is what I found it to be when I discovered it in my history.

In my dreams she and I seem to be made for each other. And when I was a little boy suffering overly much in the ten years I spent in the hospital, she was always there to comfort me.

When I came to man's estate I became involved in several unfortunate affairs of the heart. After each one, in my dreams, she would comfort me again. And last year, when I had a major operation, I lost all desire to live before I went under ether. SHE sent me back to the land of the living, saying that although she had waited a lifetime for me, my time was "Not yet, not yet!"

Now this tale of mine might sound like a bit of your own fiction, but I swear that it is true, Mr. Quinn, and I'm telling it to you because I have a feeling that you, perhaps, would understand it. Can you? Oh, yes, I forgot to say that the lady's name seems to be Iona. That is all I can tell you of my strange dream. I hope you don't get the idea that I'm wacky.

However, I feel that because I know you in a distant, friendly way, you will give me your diagnosis of it.

In the meantime, let me again congratulate you on your *Song Without Words*. I'll remember it a long time.

Now please excuse it because I close so abruptly. The whistle snorted 11 p.m. and I have to be off to bed. That is, if I want to work tomorrow. I am a map tracer in government service, and Uncle Sammy likes well-rested employees. So until I hear from you,

I am sincerely,
RUSSELL E. NIHLEAN

9 Rockefeller Plaza
New York, N. Y.

Write to MARTIN WARE, SECRETARY

• This is your club—a medium to help you and other fantasy and science-fiction fans get together. Readers wanted it—they wrote in telling us how much they would enjoy meeting others of similar tastes.

• Membership is very simple: just drop us a line, so that we can enroll you on the club roster, and publish your name and address in the magazine.

• A membership card carrying the above design—personal token of your fellowship with the weird and the fantastic—will be sent on request. (A stamped, addressed envelope should be enclosed.)

New Branch of Weird Tales Club

Allow me to announce that the Louisiana State Fantasy Society is being formed. We would like to affiliate with the WEIRD TALES CLUB. All those interested should contact Thomas Brackett at Box 214, Winnsboro, Louisiana.

Science-fiction is also a phase of the club.

This society is situated down in the most picturesque and romantic section of our country and so it has a lot to start on.

Please list me as a WEIRD TALES CLUB member.

James Vozzbel.

Opelousas, Louisiana.

Raised Among the Banshees

I was born amid all sorts of superstition. I saw fear in old people's eyes when they saw my mother with her glorious red hair. Of course, this was in the far-off Blackett Islands, but I am steeped in the lore of the Irish. Can tell your horrible members all sorts of spooky tales. I was born in Ireland; came here when I was eighteen. I'm twenty-six now. A widower with a year-old son. By profession I'm a teacher. I'm lame, but don't let it interfere with my ghost-hunting.

I've read your magazine since I've been here.

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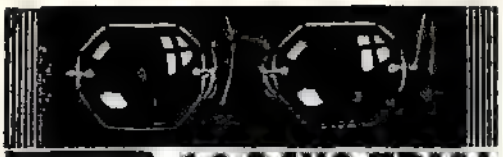

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It has grown up. I like it a lot. Keep up the good work.

I hope all fellow-members will write to me. But I prefer the male members to write. I'm afraid of ladies! I'll answer all sorts of questions about Irish folk-lore as long as my memory holds out.

Mark Cathal.

1930 E. 79th Street,
Cleveland, Ohio.

Are There Such Things?

I am sixteen years old and enjoy your magazine immensely. I wish it came out oftener. I get tired of the ordinary run of stories and read WEIRD TALES as a refreshing contrast. It gives me something to think about. Could such things happen?

Although I have found no one else in St. Joseph who reads WEIRD TALES, yet I am going to get some of my friends to read it as a relief from stuffy classics.

Shirley Grable.

617 Pine Street,
St. Joseph, Michigan.

She's a Delayed Action Bomb

Ever since I first learned to read, about fifteen years ago, my favorite reading matter (between chapters of *Dracula*) has been WEIRD TALES. For most of that time, too, I've been wishing for something like this WT Club. I'm like a delayed action bomb, though—after the first excitement is all over, I burst upon the scene. Here I am, then, to join this association of readers; and would you please send me one of Mr. Bok's charming membership cards?

I'd like other members to write to me. Like my father, who has written many stories for WT and various detective magazines, I am greatly interested in the occult and all things weird. My conversation also runs to opera, musicians, literature, and the horrors of life in a writer's family.

Rosalind Suter.

176 Benita Avenue,
Youngstown, Ohio.

He's for the Club One Hundred Percent

Am one of that legion who is attracted by the strange and unusual, be it fact or fiction. I travel a good deal in my work and at present have no permanent address. Am watching your publication for information on the forming of WT Clubs in any of the towns or cities which I visit as it would be a pleasure to meet those whose interests are mine.

Am for the WTC 100 percent and believe it will be a great success. My age is twenty-one.

Sincerely,

Randall Hockett.

Gold Beach, Oregon.

Pendulum Pencil Pushers

I've been an acclaimed reader of WEIRD TALES for at least ten years. Have found the majority of your stories magnetically entertaining.

Am truly enthusiastic about your WEIRD TALES CLUB. That, too, should prove a pleasing pastime. Please enroll me as a dependable member. Here's to long and greater success to WEIRD TALES, and its writing staff.

Am twenty-eight years old, and desire those club member's between twenty-one and thirty for my correspondence scrimmages. Am exceptionally interested in pendulum pencil pushers who enjoy the hobby of scrolling sense seasoned with non-sense, plus a little weirdness tossed in for good measure. So, my writing, welcome, weird welders.

Write! Don't stall-o-graph!

Harold W. Tiffany.

349 E. Rosedale Avenue,
Milwaukee, Wis.

Snakes and W.T. His Hobby

For the past several years snakes have been my hobby. Besides reading everything I could about them and listening to others talk of them and the superstitions that have grown about them, I have personally chased snakes all over the canyon, creek, lakes and prairies about Lubbock. Why I should become so deeply interested in them I don't know. Perhaps it is because the snake is supposed to have started the fall of man from Paradise. Or perhaps it is because of the many superstitions and beliefs about the powers credited to them, sometimes bordering on the supernatural, that has drawn me to them. Then perhaps it was simply because I usually like something which humanity in general cannot, or does not, tolerate. Whatever the reason, snakes and good fantastic literature like WEIRD TALES are my two great loves. Give me those and I can live in peace.

During these years of reading about snakes, talking about snakes, and sometimes literally living with them, I've collected some good stories about their powers, both real and imagined. Because I always like to talk or discuss things that happen but cannot always be explained, I should like to join your new club and get the membership card. I shall be very glad to hear from any member who is interested in snakes or has a snake story to tell.

I'm a junior in college, with a major in journalism and a yen for travel. And if there are any of you buzzards here in Lubbock who'd like to organize a WEIRD TALES CLUB, drop me a card.

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Edward Lester, 11th C. A., Headquarters Batt., Fort H. G. Wright, N. Y.
M. L. Lynch, 270 E. 95th St., Brooklyn, N. Y.
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Bob McKinly, 222 S. 53rd St., Philadelphia, Pa.
Rev. A. L. Smith, 214 Euclid Ave., Brookville, Pa.
M. Hyde, 25 E. Washington St., Chicago, Ill. (Dr. Kindt's Office.)
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Russell J. Hansen, 724 Park St., Hartford, Conn.
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Tom White, 249 South Harvard, Apt. 302, Los Angeles, Calif.
Victor Pappalardo, 722 Eighth Ave., New York, N. Y.
James Vozzbel, Opelousas, La.
Mark Cathal, 1930 E. 79th St., Cleveland, Ohio.
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We're sorry that lack of space prevents the inclusion of the names of all New Members. The rest will appear next time.

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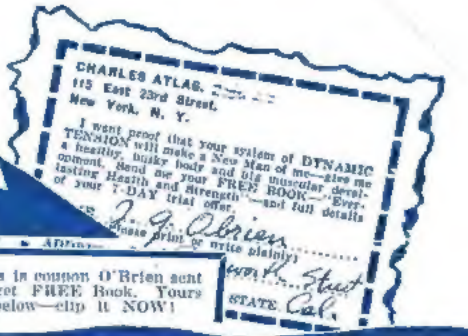

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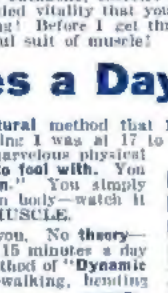

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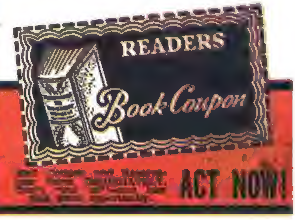

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